

Interfaith Scotland

Newsletter Spring 2021: Issue 35

Making a Difference through Dialogue



World Interfaith Harmony Week 2021 - Page 31



Holocaust Memorial Day
Scotland 2021 - Page 6



Interfaith Scotland Year
of Climate Action- Page 9



Scottish Interfaith Week 2020 - Page 11



Local Interfaith Groups News - Page 26

Also in this issue:

Annual Interfaith
Lecture 2020

With Professor Jason Leitch

Faiths Unite:
Visions for Transformative
Climate Action

A series of three climate
related webinars

Interfaith Buddies
Connecting Through Conversation

Scottish Faiths Action
for Refugees

Welcoming refugees through
multi-faith partnership

A Year of Climate Action: Together for our Planet

Only a few months ago I wrote that we were all praying for a vaccine for COVID-19 and it is incredible to witness already a vaccination programme in full swing. There is perhaps light at the end of the 'pandemic tunnel'.

The international collaboration that was needed to create this vaccine and to begin to roll it out globally has been phenomenal and demonstrates just what humanity is capable of when we work together for the good of all. It has, of course, highlighted the gross inequalities in our world but has also shown that humanity is capable of great things. In Scotland, faith leaders and faith communities have been able to encourage everyone to have the vaccine when they are offered it, as an important step in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

It is with this spirit of collaboration and hope that Interfaith Scotland is inaugurating **A Year of Climate Action** to coincide with COP26 coming to Glasgow (and beyond). This focus will allow all of our dialogue events, Scottish Interfaith Week, our engagement with partners and our engagement with COP26 to take place with a faith and interfaith-based lens on the Climate Crisis. We began our Climate engagement journey many years ago and in 2020 we held international collaborative climate focussed events throughout the year and this will continue throughout 2021.

World Interfaith Harmony Week: One example of our Climate Focus is the **Beyond Climate Crisis** series launched in World Interfaith Harmony Week. This series will demonstrate that the Climate Crisis is 'Beyond' anything humanity has previously faced but it will also help us to see that if we pull together as a human race, with all our diverse talents and expertise, we will be able to avert this crisis and build a world fit for all humanity, all animal life and all plant life to flourish.

Spring is just around the corner and the team at Interfaith Scotland are looking forward to working with all of you and hope you enjoy this Spring Edition 2021 of our newsletter.

Dr Maureen Sier, Director



Dr Maureen Sier, Director

Contents

Interfaith Scotland
News

Page 3 - 8

Interfaith Scotland
Year of
Climate Action

Page 9 - 10

Scottish Interfaith
Week 2020

Page 11 - 25

Local Interfaith
Groups

Page 26 - 30

World Interfaith
Harmony Week

Page 31 - 34

Feature Articles

Page 34 - 38

Annual Interfaith Lecture 2020

On 14 September 2020 Interfaith Scotland was honoured to have National Clinical Director in the Health and Social Care Directorate, Professor Jason Leitch, deliver the Annual Interfaith Lecture on the topic of 'Science and Religion: my personal approach to the Pandemic'.

The annual lecture was both timely and extremely interesting as it related directly both to the pandemic and also to how Professor Leitch relies on his own faith tradition as a Christian to navigate the complex world he inhabits in his important role.

Over 100 guests from diverse faith traditions joined us for the annual lecture in person and were able to



National Clinical Director in the Health and Social Care Directorate, Professor Jason Leitch

directly engage with Professor Leitch, and in addition the lecture was recorded and viewed by over 1.5K viewers on our YouTube channel.

Annual Networking Seminar for Local Interfaith Groups

Interfaith Scotland continues to support local interfaith groups throughout the pandemic. In October we held our annual networking seminar which brings together members of local interfaith groups from across Scotland.

At the seminar local groups were invited to share updates of their activities during the year. There were presentations from Venus Carew from Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group, Bushra Iqbal from the Abrahamic Roots Group, Rolf Schmidt from Inverness Interfaith Group, and

Frank Bowness from Fife Interfaith Group before a time of sharing from other groups present. Linda Gateley from the Connected Communities Division, Scottish Government gave a presentation on the new Places of Worship Security Funding Scheme.

Places of Worship Fund

In October 2020 the Scottish Government provided £25,000 over a three-month period for faith communities to assist them in opening their places of worship safely and staying open in a safe manner through the purchase of sanitisers and PPE.

The funding also supported the continuation of the live streaming of services and meditation, holding services and activities on Zoom and sending service sheets and newsletters in the post to members. £500 was available per place of worship and the fund was administered by Interfaith Scotland. A total of 56 places of worship and one interfaith centre were supported by the Places of Worship Grant Funding from October – December 2020 including those from the Buddhist, Baha'i, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic and Scottish Episcopal Churches.

Cross Party Group on freedom of religion or belief

Focus on Religious Minorities in India

In November last year the group met online for the second time. Our focus for the meeting was the circumstances of religious minorities in India and we heard powerful presentations from both Kirndeeep Kaur of Sikh Sanjog and Alan Meldrum of Open Doors.

Kirndeeep spoke on the history and current challenges facing the Sikh community in India, from the origins of the faith and its early experience of persecution through to the current day. Alan's speech followed and he noted many similarities faced by the Christian community in India and also those

of other faiths including the Muslim population.

Both speakers expressed concern for a growing climate of Hindu nationalism in India and described numerous examples of discrimination and violence against members of other faiths. Kirndeeep in particular informed

the group of the case of Jagtar Singh Johal, a British citizen of the Sikh faith who was arrested in 2017 while in India for his wedding and has been held without trial. The group decided to write a letter to the Indian Consulate in relation to his case.

Focus on the Uyghur and Rohingya Muslims

At the February meeting of the Cross Party Group on Freedom of Religion and Belief John Mason MSP (Parliamentary sponsor of the CPG) warmly welcomed Rahima Mahmut and Hannah Rose Thomas as the key note speakers.

Rahima is a Uyghur singer, human rights activist and award-winning translator. Her work includes working for the ITV documentary 'Undercover: Inside China's Digital Gulag' which won many major awards including a BAFTA TV and International Emmy. Currently, Rahima is the UK Project Director of the World Uyghur Congress and advisor to the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China. Rahima shared deeply disturbing information and personal stories of the suffering of the



Uyghur people in China and called on the world to please do something to call to account the Chinese Government for their persecution of the Uyghur Muslims.

Hannan Rose Thomas is a British artist who uses her art as a powerful tool for advocacy. She has organised art projects with Syrian refugees in Jordan; with Yezidi women who escaped ISIS and with Rohingya children in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Her most recent art project has been with survivors of Boko Haram and Fulani violence in Northern Nigeria. Through these projects Hannah brings the stories of those who have faced displacement and conflict related sexual violence into places of influence in the Global North. Her



paintings have been shown in places including the UK and Scottish Parliament, European Parliament, Buckingham Palace, Lambeth Palace, Westminster Abbey and Saatchi Gallery. At the CPG she shared her experience of living with the Rohingya community in Bangladesh. Her experience was profoundly moving and

the paintings she shared of the human face of suffering impacted on all who attended the Cross Party Group. It is critical that we see the suffering of any community in our interconnected world as unacceptable and speak out whenever there is an opportunity. The CPG meeting was filmed and we will seek permission to share the filming widely so that others can be aware of what is happening.

The Social Renewal Advisory Board 'If not now, when?' Report

The Director of Interfaith Scotland was honoured to sit on the Social Renewal Advisory Board along with colleagues from diverse organisations across Scotland.

The Social Renewal Advisory Board was set up by Scottish Ministers to make proposals that can renew Scotland once we start to emerge from the pandemic. Warm thanks are also extended to those individuals, faith communities and local interfaith groups who helped frame the thinking around what Scotland could do to renew itself during and post-pandemic. The final report 'If not now, when?' sets a course towards this future.

The full report can be obtained on the Scottish Government Website at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/not-now-social-renewal-advisory-board-report-january-2021/>

The First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, said of the report

"I think what they have produced is excellent. There's not much I read these days... that gives me lots of reasons for optimism and cheer but that did. It set out a really uplifting blueprint for how we can do what many of us have talked about over the last year which is making sure that when we come out of this pandemic, we do so with a different outlook and a different sense of purpose about the kind of society we want to have here in Scotland. So, I would certainly recommend it to anybody who is wanting to feel a bit inspired about what the world might look like when we come out of the crisis we are in just now."

Excerpt from the Report...

It is said in times of crisis, look for the helpers - and we have seen incredible examples of individuals and families, public and community services, organisations and businesses coming together to respond, with a spirit of collaboration, resilience, creativity and compassion. We heard countless stories of people going above and beyond; volunteers young and old are allying to help feed families and deliver essential medicines; and organisations of all kinds working in partnership as never before to save lives and protect communities. But alongside that civic response, this pandemic has brutally exposed the inequalities that still blight the lives of too many, limiting our ability to flourish, control our own lives and contribute our talents to create an inclusive, fairer Scotland. Disabled people, minority ethnic communities, people on low incomes, older people, younger people, and women are amongst those who have experienced disproportionate impacts, with multiple disadvantages making things even harder for many. So, while COVID-19 is still very much with us and evolving in a deeply concerning way at the time of writing, we should not wait for the pandemic to be over to learn lessons and begin to plan a way forward towards social renewal. This report by the Social Renewal Advisory Board is, therefore, a Call to Action. A call to not hold back the social action which made the difference to so many lives but instead to unleash it so it can grow. A call to turn the tide on poor outcomes created - often unwittingly - by barriers in the systems that shape how our society works. A call to realise in full the change we now know is possible.

Holocaust Memorial Day Scotland 2021

Scotland's Holocaust Memorial Day Ceremony 2021 was like no other. For the first time in the history of HMD, Interfaith Scotland, in collaboration with the HMD steering committee, organised a fully virtual ceremony aimed at Scottish secondary school pupils.

This was accompanied by educational resources which were distributed to every secondary school in Scotland by Education Scotland. The ceremony premiered on YouTube and Vimeo on January 27th and so far, over 3000 people across the world have watched the ceremony. We were delighted to have the ceremony highlighted on BBC News, Reporting Scotland, STV News, BBC Radio Scotland, The Guardian, The Jewish Telegraph, The Herald, Glasgow Evening Times and USA Today.

The ceremony began with a message from First Minister Nicola Sturgeon who talked about her visit to Auschwitz and the importance of marking Holocaust Memorial Day. She stressed that HMD allows us to honour and remember the victims of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Darfur. It reminds us of the persecution people have suffered for their ethnicity, religious belief, disability or sexual orientation. The First Minister also spoke about how this year's theme, Be the Light in the Darkness, highlighted the responsibility we all have to promote truth and tolerance and reject prejudice and division:

"The Holocaust and the other atrocities that we mark today must serve as a warning to all of us. They show what can happen when intolerance and prejudice are left unchallenged and when hate is given free rein."

Mala Tribich MBE spoke about her experience of the Holocaust and survival. Mala's story is one of incredible strength, sadness and

resilience. Born in 1930 in Piotrkow, Poland, Mala survived horrific conditions in the ghetto and was hidden in Czestochowa. She was later deported to Ravensbruck Concentration Camp and ultimately was liberated by the British Army from Bergen Belsen in 1945 at the age of just 14. To her shock, her brother Ben had survived the war, and they reunited in England several years later. Mala was honoured by the Queen with an MBE (Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) and currently lives in London.

Mala's moving testimony was followed by the playing of Solnyshko: Don't Wake Me Up which is based on an ancient Russian Gypsy folk melody. The piece was composed by prominent Russian Gypsy musician Oleg Ponomarev, arranged by Lev Atlas of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and performed by young musicians from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland Juniors and Douglas Academy. Composer Ponomarev then lit a candle in memory of all Sinti and Roma people who perished in the Holocaust. During World War Two, Sinti and Roma people suffered greatly as victims of Nazi persecution and genocide. The destiny of Gypsies was similar to the one of Jews under Nazis – total annihilation. It is not known precisely how many Sinti and Roma were killed in the Holocaust.



Lev Atlas, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland at Roma Memorial in Queen's Park with film crew present

After the beautiful performance of Solnyshko: Don't Wake Me Up, we were honoured to hear from young people, reading the testimonies of survivors of genocide. Scottish school pupil Jayden Groden read the testimony of his great grandmother, Marianne Grant, a survivor of The Holocaust. Sonita Dann from Phnom Penh, Cambodia, read the testimony of Arn Chorn-Pond who was a survivor of the Genocide in Cambodia. Dženita Hasanovic from Bosnia read the testimony of her father Hasan, a survivor of the Srebrenica Genocide in 1995. Taj read the testimony of Abdul from Darfur. Laine and Carmella

Rubayiza recited a poem by their mother, Marie-Claire Nyinawumuntu, a survivor of the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994. The poem is called 'I am the child of a survivor' and is printed across the page.

Rabbi Moshe Rubin, Chief Rabbi of Scotland, then introduced the song Ani Ma'amin. In 1942, composer Azriel Fastag was put on a train to Treblinka concentration camp, along with hundreds of other Jews. While on the train he composed Ani Ma'amin. Azriel began singing the song, at first quietly, and eventually with his full voice. Soon everyone on the train was singing the moving, haunting melody together with him. Only two people in that cart survived and they brought the tune to America. For the ceremony, Rabbi Moshe Rubin sang the tune, of hope and faith and a better tomorrow, while being filmed in Giffnock Synagogue, Glasgow.

The ceremony concluded with a message from Aileen Campbell, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, and the lighting of memorial candles.

The candles for HMD 2021 were lit for:

- The 6 million Jewish people murdered by the Nazis
- The Roma and Sinti communities murdered by the Nazis
- The people with disabilities murdered by the Nazis
- Those murdered because of their sexualities by the Nazis
- All those murdered in subsequent genocides, including Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur
- All those suffering in recent and current conflicts including the Rohingya and Uighur Muslims
- And additional candles were lit to thank all those educators and activists who continue to be the light in the darkness.

If you would like to watch the ceremony again, you can find the link on our website: www.interfaithscotland.org/holocaust-memorial-day-2021

I am the child of a survivor
I bring smiles, hopes and tears
I bring laughter and tenderness
I am the child of a survivor

I am the child of a survivor
I bring love, a memory, a resemblance
I ask a lot of questions...
I see tears, I sense sorrow but I also see hope
I am the child of a survivor

I am the child of a survivor
I see hurt and I see sadness
But I believe in a better world
A better humanity
I am the child of a survivor

I am the child of a survivor
I am the link to those we lost and to those alive
I am the keeper of memories
Memories of those we hold dear
Memories of those we will never meet
But memories we hold close, here, in our hearts...

I am the child of a survivor
I listen, to stories of people who are now memories
Memories of smiles, places, photos
Memories of our parents' past!
I am the child of a survivor

I am the child of a survivor
And I am here today
Remembering those I will never meet
My aunt, grandpa, many family members
But whose courage, kindness, smiles, love
I inherited 17

I am the child of a survivor
Through the eyes of my parents
I see the lost memories that made me!
I am the child of a survivor
I see miracles, I live miracles
I am the child of a survivor

I am the child of a survivor
And I am forever grateful
For the lives of survivors
Because without a survivor
I wouldn't be here today!
I am thankful for the kindness of a few,
I am thankful for the lives of my parents,
For the lives of family close or far
I am thankful!

I know how precious life is
And I do not take things for granted!
I am the child of a survivor
I am thankful to be
The keeper of hope, healing and peace!
I am the child of a survivor

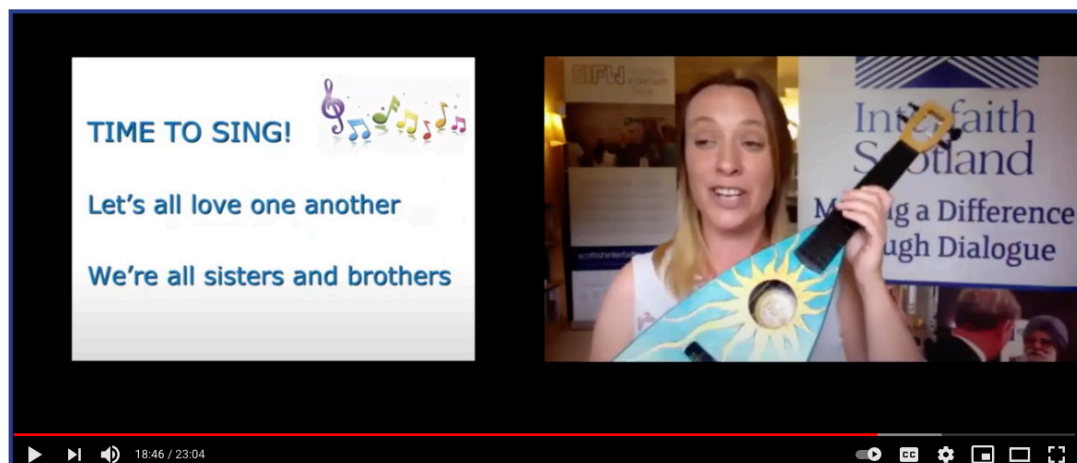
I am the child of a survivor
I see resilience
I see hope
I see strength
And I believe in miracles and simple things in life
I am the child of a survivor

We are the children of survivors
And we give lots of hugs
We are the hope for the new generation
Hope for peace
Hope for healing
We are the children of survivors

Resources for Schools

In more 'normal' times, our National Development Officer Frances Hume would be visiting schools with volunteers from different faiths as part of our 'Face to Faith' schools programme.

Since this hasn't been possible during the pandemic she created a series of videos that could be used as a resource for primary and secondary school pupils. In the introductory videos Frances shares about what interfaith is, why it is important, and the work of Interfaith Scotland. In the primary school video she also shares her own interfaith journey to India,



demonstrates some religious objects and teaches a song that she wrote for children to encourage them during the lockdown. Following this, a series of shows called 'Ask Me Anything' was created. Young people in schools across Scotland were invited to send in their questions to our young volunteers

from eight different faiths - Christian, Jewish, Sikh, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Baha'i and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This was made into a series of five shows with two volunteers per show answering the questions. All the videos are available to view at the links below.

Primary School video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47K5poV_WPE

Secondary School video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lrFLEln6f0>

Ask me Anything shows: <https://tinyurl.com/w6294nx5>

Spotlight on our Holocaust Memorial Day Volunteer

Mamie Philp is one of our dedicated volunteers and lives in Edinburgh. After a 10-year civil service career in Cheshire and London she retrained to teach history.

She is now a writer and continues to teach history part time. Following visits to Rwanda, experiencing the work of Survivors Fund (SURF) and the Reaching Rwanda programme, Mamie represents this wonderful charity and promotes the life-changing Reaching Rwanda programme in Scotland. Reaching Rwanda is an educational project that connects students in the UK with survivors of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi and their families. The project provides students with the opportunity to become actively

“By working together through education, discussion and events, I believe we can change lives.”
Mamie Philp

involved in a fundraising campaign, get to choose exactly how the money they raise is spent, and to see how the money benefits the lives of recipients.

SURF supports survivors to rebuild their lives through long-term commitment to projects that are high impact and sustainable. So many people, including children, are helped to get food, homes, health care, education and employment.

Mamie is also an Educator for the Holocaust Educational Trust's flagship Lessons from Auschwitz project which

takes young people from all over the UK through a learning programme about the Holocaust, including a one-day visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau. She is looking forward to when these visits can resume. Mamie is delighted to be a volunteer for Interfaith Scotland and Interfaith Scotland is delighted to add Mamie to our wonderful band of volunteers.



Mamie Philp

Interfaith Scotland Year of Climate Action

Background Information: COP26 - What is it?

COP26 is the 26th conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and it will take place, Covid restrictions permitting, at the Scottish Event Campus in Glasgow from 1 to 12 November 2021. Since the first COP in Berlin in 1995 there has been slow and painstaking progress towards international agreement. In Paris in 2015 (COP21) there was agreement to limit global warming to well below 2-C compared to pre-industrial levels and, if possible, to 1.5-C. As global temperatures rise so do the range of risks and their severity rise also. The Climate crisis is real and faces all of humanity, whatever their religion, belief system, cultural heritage or ethnicity. The pandemic saw one of the tiniest elements of creation, a virus, threaten humanity - the climate is perhaps one of nature's biggest natural elements and the threat of global warming is a big one too!

Many religious traditions and faith-based organisations are joining with others to ask Governments to follow through on the commitments they made in Paris to reduce greenhouse

gas emissions (called NDC's or nationally determined contributions). NDCs have to be revised and strengthened every five years and the Glasgow COP is five years on from Paris. Unless the commitments in the current NDCs are strengthened and put into effect urgently there is no hope of limiting global warming to 2-C.

Interfaith Scotland Year of Climate Action:

acknowledging all of the above Interfaith Scotland has decided that the coming year will be our Year of Climate Action and this newsletter captures some of what we have undertaken to date and includes some of our ideas for the future (please feel free to email us any of your interfaith/faith-based climate action ideas).

Religious Leaders' Forum: In October 2020 the Religious Leaders' Forum met for their twice-yearly meeting, online on this occasion. The Forum was very honoured to welcome Nigel Topping, The UK Government High Level Climate Action Champion. Nigel



UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE UK 2021

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ITALY

was born on St Andrew's Day in Glasgow and he spoke candidly and with hope about what we can all do in preparation for the COP26 Climate Summit and beyond. The religious leaders present were able to begin work on a faith-based 'Statement of Commitment' and were assisted in doing this by Adrian Shaw, the new Interfaith Scotland volunteer (see below). In the weeks to follow the statement was refined and received full commitment from all the Religious Leaders on the Forum. A video reading by Ravinder Kaur Nijjar (Sikh community) and The Rt Reverend Martin Fair (Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland) can be seen on Interfaith Scotland's YouTube channel and a hardcopy of the statement can be sent to you by contacting maureen@interfaithscotland.org

Spotlight on our Climate Action Volunteer, Adrian Shaw

Adrian Shaw was the Climate Change Officer of the Church of Scotland from 2007 until 2020.

Adrian is returning to university in Glasgow later this year to study for a PhD but until then is supporting Interfaith Scotland, Eco Congregation Scotland and others preparing for COP26. Adrian said, "Although we cannot be sure how many delegates will travel to Glasgow in November for COP26 or to what extent the negotiations will be held



Adrian Shaw

online it is clear that both the UN and UK governments are committed to making the conference happen and that Glasgow will be the focus of attention. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for faith groups to learn about climate change, make their concerns known and to demonstrate that they can be part of the solution. I am delighted

that Interfaith Scotland is playing a leading role and can help make 2021 a memorable experience - for all the right reasons".

Adrian is currently working on a briefing paper suitable for diverse faith communities and Interfaith Scotland will be sharing this soon. You can also keep in touch with developments via the Interfaith Scotland website and e-newsletters and at www.climatefringe.org

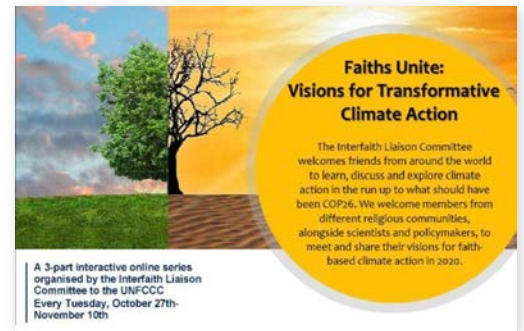
Faiths Unite: Visions for Transformative Climate Action (Webinar series)

Interfaith Scotland worked with the International Interfaith Liaison Committee and Interfaith Glasgow to put on a series of three climate related webinars.

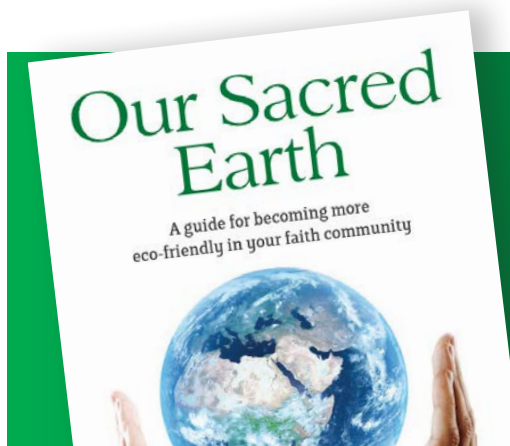
Each webinar focused on a different topic; 'The World We Want'; 'COP26 – Ramping Up Ambition' and 'Hope for the Future' and the collaboration was truly international from the planning process right through to the delivery by incredibly engaging speakers.

There were a number of presenters at each webinar and they came from

the following countries: Brazil, India, South Africa, UK, Belgium, Thailand, Bonn, Geneva, Fiji, Nairobi, Switzerland and Australia. Each presenter was an expert in their particular field of the climate crisis and each spoke from a faith perspective while weaving scientific expertise through their talks. It was a profound privilege for Interfaith



Scotland to be part of such global engagement and we are looking forward to a further webinar with our international partners in April 2021.



Our Sacred Earth

Another brief reminder is included in this newsletter of the booklet 'Our Sacred Earth' which was compiled by Interfaith Scotland to assist faith communities to be eco-friendly in their places of worship and in their community practices. Please visit the resource page on the Interfaith Scotland website for a free copy of the resource.



World Interfaith Harmony Grove

As we are using this newsletter to highlight our Year of Climate Action we wanted to bring to the attention of our readers a reminder of the World Interfaith Harmony Grove that Interfaith Scotland founded in 2019 as part of our 20th Anniversary celebrations.

The appropriate planting of trees is highlighted as one of the ways that we can greatly help the planet and Trees for Life manage our World Interfaith Harmony Grove with care.

Please do visit the Grove online and purchase a tree or two for future generations to enjoy:
<https://treesforlife.org.uk/groves/g8922/>

Going Forward 2021 and Beyond

Interfaith Scotland has many plans in the pipeline for our Year of Climate Action and would love to hear your ideas too. Please contact maureen@interfaithscotland.org if you have any thoughts on what Interfaith Scotland could do to encourage climate action. Our ideas include a Pilgrimage for the Planet, a linked theme for Scottish Interfaith Week 2021, a series of climate related interfaith events (probably online due to the pandemic), training for interfaith groups on faith-based climate action, and a possible collaborative 'well-being' space, including a chaplaincy, for the delegates at the COP26 summit. We are excited to hear your ideas so please do get in touch.

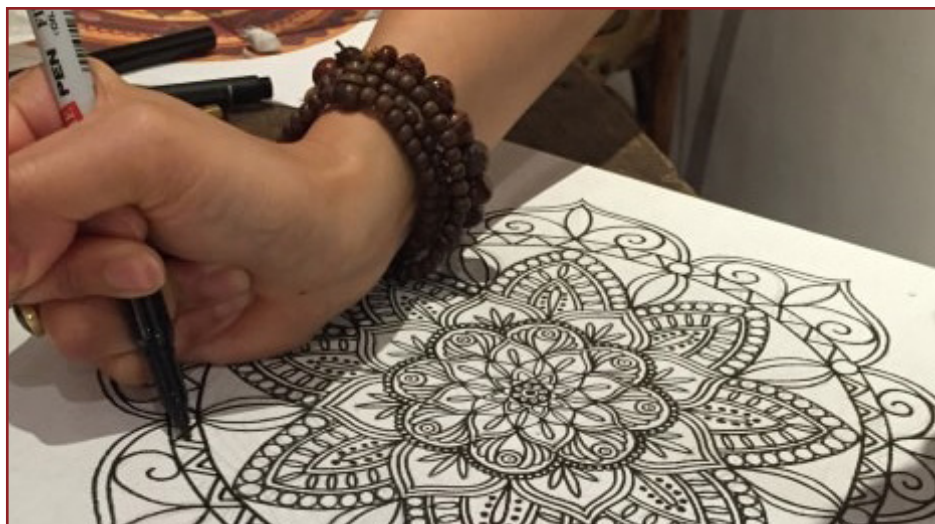
Scottish Interfaith Week 2020

For the first time ever, Scottish Interfaith Week was hosted entirely online in 2020. Despite the challenges of going digital, the Interfaith Scotland team were thrilled with the idea of using the internet to open doors for more people to engage with interfaith dialogue and build connections regardless of location.

With the hard work of local interfaith groups, organisations from Scotland and further afield, passionate individuals, and the Interfaith Scotland team, we collectively hosted over 65 events for Scottish Interfaith Week 2020.

The variety and creativity of the events for 2020 was exceptional and we would like to say a huge thank you to all our event organisers who rose to the challenge of hosting and engaging in events online. Audiences from around the world were able to participate in interfaith dialogue through creative workshops, panel discussions, book readings, webinars, poetry nights, cooking classes, gallery exhibitions, training courses, virtual tours, and much more.

Our theme for 2020, 'Connecting', was key for developing a programme of events which reflected the pressing need in our communities for human connection during a time of isolation. We knew many people were feeling disconnected last year and we were delighted to provide hundreds of people with the opportunity to attend interesting events, meet new people and build meaningful relationships.



We were also thrilled with First Minister Nicola Sturgeon's message in which she thanked faith communities and local interfaith groups for their work throughout the pandemic, and reflected on the importance of Scottish Interfaith Week:

"I think this year's theme of being connected is very appropriate. The pandemic has shown how closely we are all connected and how much we all depend on each other and it has demonstrated once again the importance of our interfaith groups. Your work of bringing people together will be more important than ever as

our country seeks to recover from this crisis."

Our hope for the upcoming year, and Scottish Interfaith Week 2021, is to continue building a world that is kinder and infinitely more connected. We hope you will join us this November for another incredible week of interfaith dialogue and connection.

If you missed Scottish Interfaith Week 2020 or wish to relive it, you can watch some of the recorded highlights on the Scottish Interfaith Week website.

<https://scottishinterfaithweek.org/missed-scottish-interfaith-week-watch-it-again>



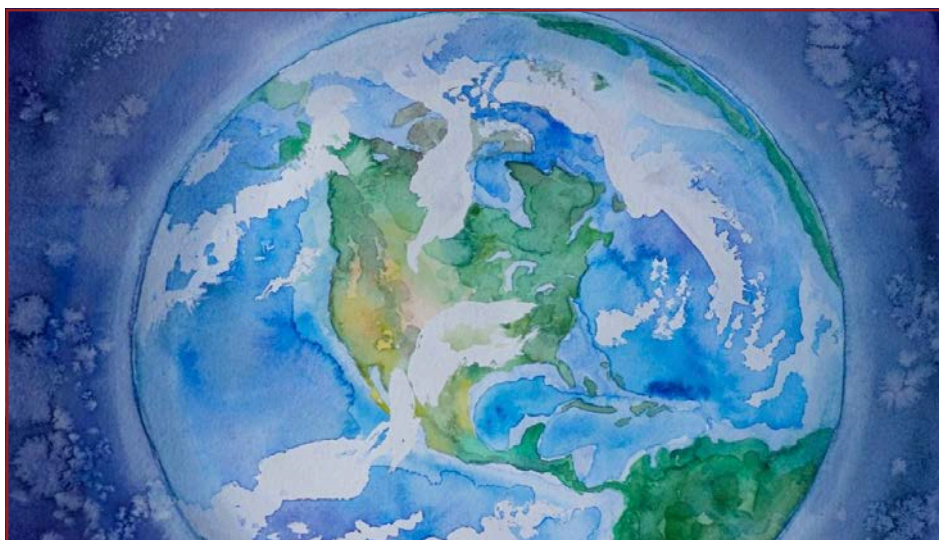
Scottish Interfaith Week: Interfaith Scotland Events

Connecting Globally

Due to the pandemic, the theme of 'Connecting' was an ideal theme for 2020 and resonated with everyone we spoke to. Staying connected during COVID-19 became critical to people from all walks of life and Interfaith Scotland's early decision to hold an online festival proved to be fortuitous. An upside to the pandemic and doing everything 'online' (and thanks to Zoom technology) we were able to use our opening event to connect globally and engage with award winning guest speakers from Israel, USA and New Zealand. Speaking from America we had Dr Hayat Ghazala from St Louis University; from New Zealand came Jocelyn Armstrong of the Religious Diversity Trust; and from Israel Dr Sarah Bernstein from the Rossing Centre for Education and Dialogue). Each presenter spoke movingly about their

work, the importance of international networking and the impact of the pandemic on their lives. Each of their presentations can be found on the Interfaith Scotland YouTube Channel.

It is always an honour and privilege to engage with interfaith activists from across the globe and to be part of a huge network of people working for religious harmony and understanding.



Postcards for Solidarity

For Scottish Interfaith Week, we invited people to join award-winning artist Iman Tajik to create and send a Postcard for Solidarity to people around the world and to be part of an online exhibition – our first ever – for Scottish Interfaith Week 2020.

The philosophy behind the postcards was that no matter where you were born, where you live, what language you speak, your skin colour, religion,

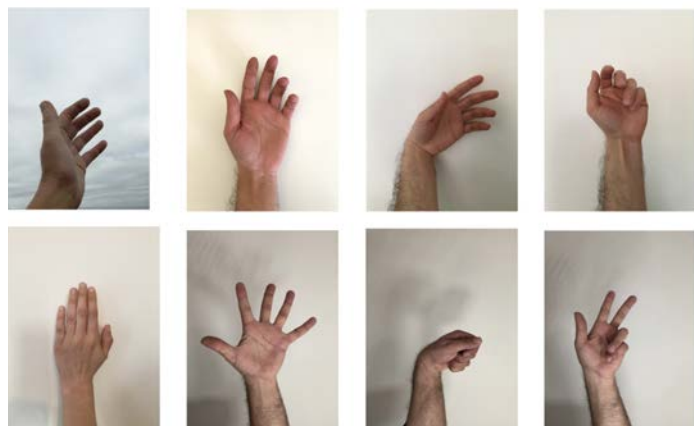
or belief – in 2020, you lived through a global pandemic with the rest of humanity and the future still remains unclear for all of us today. We hoped the postcards would create a sense of solidarity and bring hope to people around the world.

Participants attended two evening workshops which were held in October, ahead of the festival. In the first workshop, Iman explored the nature of self-portraiture through photography with the participants and guided them on taking photographs of their hands. The photographs that each participant produced was then to be featured on one side of their

postcard. In the second workshop, Glasgow-based poet and educator Loll Jung explored writing methods which participants used to express their experiences of lockdown; describing what they had learnt and lost, and about their hopes and dreams for the future. This unique message was featured on the other side of the postcard which they created. The finished postcards were then sent anonymously to people around the world, and participants could choose to receive one in return. The final postcards were also exhibited on the Scottish Interfaith Week website, as part of the week-long festival which launched on Sunday 8th November.

You can view the online exhibition of Postcards for Solidarity on the Scottish Interfaith Week website:

www.scottishinterfaithweek.org/postcardsforsolidarity



Creative writing workshop with Nadine Aisha Jassat and the Scottish Book Trust

This year Interfaith Scotland was delighted to partner with the Scottish Book Trust for a two-part series of events: one for Scottish Interfaith Week and another for Book Week Scotland. For Scottish Interfaith Week we invited award-winning author and poet Nadine Aisha Jassat to run a creative writing workshop on the themes of connection, future and faith. The evening event was full of creativity and joy from the dozens of people who came along to the workshop. Nadine encouraged everyone to use the art of writing to reflect on their experiences from the past year, what role their faith played, and what their expectations and hope were for the future.

Nadine led the workshop with a wonderfully calming approach which

many of the audience members described as positive, relaxing, welcoming and nurturing. When Nadine asked the question, "What does faith mean to you?" members of the audience said that faith means: Belonging, comfort, things not seen, motivation to stick to things, optimism that things will be okay, a higher force which brings me so much hope, embracing complexity and multiple truths, taking a leap, feeling at home.

The week after the workshop, Nadine joined another award-winning author Leila Aboulela for a panel discussion for Book Week Scotland. The two authors explored connection, future and faith, and how their own writing handles these themes. The panel was pre-recorded and premiered online

as part of a programme of events for Book Week Scotland. Nadine and Leila had a fascinating discussion and were excited to meet each other and express their appreciation for each other's work. We hope to host more partnership events in the future for Scottish Interfaith Week and are keen to maintain our connection with the Scottish Book Trust.



Nadine Aisha Jassat

The Anti-Racist Educator

Following the appalling killing of George Floyd, and so many similar deaths, the Black Lives Matter movement inspired many to reconsider racism and their own relationship to it. The term 'ally' began to be used with greater frequency, but not always with much clarity! So as part of Scottish Interfaith Week we commissioned two excellent facilitators from the Anti-Racist Educator to lead a workshop on racism, allyship and the relationship between race and religion. The Anti-

Racist Educator are a collective of academics, educators, activists and students who work to increase equity and challenge racial injustice especially within the education system.

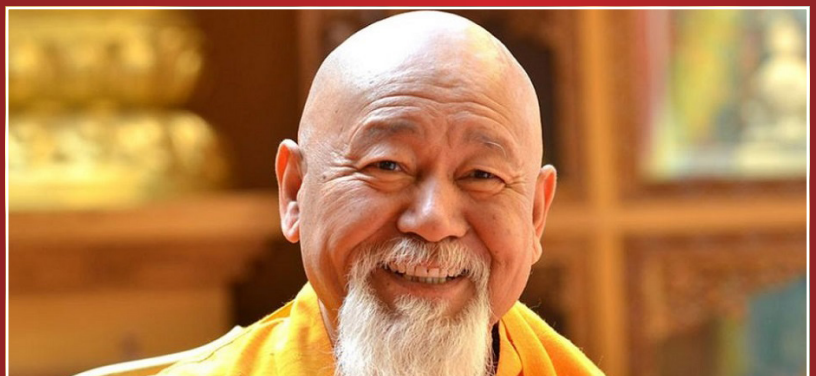
During the workshop we discussed different ways of defining and understanding racism and related experiences like Islamophobia and Antisemitism. The facilitators challenged the common idea of race – emphasising that it is a social construct

with no basis in biology, physiology or genetics. The idea of distinct races was explained as having been developed to justify the exploitation and subjugation of the colonial period. We also discussed how we understand the role of allies in tackling racism on a societal level and its impact on individual lives.

For more information go to www.theantiracisteducator.com

A Buddhist Connection with the Environment

Lama Yeshe Rinpoche, Abbot of Samye Ling Tibetan Buddhist Monastery, was interviewed by Interfaith Scotland's national development officer on the theme of 'Connecting with the Environment' for Scottish Interfaith Week 2020. Lama Yeshe shared his personal insights on the Climate Crisis, Buddhism and interfaith engagement. You can watch the interview on Interfaith Scotland's YouTube channel here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JE-Bbm6KaAU&feature=emb_logo



Community in Crisis: Connecting during COVID19

For Scottish Interfaith Week 2020, Interfaith Scotland organised an event with young people. We partnered with a youth organisation called TruThink, an interfaith dialogue platform created by students at the University of St Andrews. The event was an ideal opportunity for Interfaith Scotland to work with young people of faith and understand their views on lockdown and COVID life. We hosted a panel of young people from five different beliefs and non-beliefs – Baha’i, Hindu, Christian, Muslim and Atheist. The event was live on our Facebook

page and co-founders of TruThink, Bethany and David moderated the panel. The panellists had discussions around faith community interactions and events during the pandemic. They also answered questions from the audience about effects of lockdown during festivals, community involvement and personal opinions on community action. It was good to see young people of faith sharing stories of



community work and taking an interest in interfaith dialogue and events.

Drumming Workshop

Interfaith Scotland organised a drumming workshop with community musician Dr Jane Bentley of ArtBeat on 11 November. 55 people attended the event from all over the world including Scotland, Malaysia, Germany, Spain, India and the USA. Jane introduced the different types of instruments that people could improvise from household items. These included drums made from pots and pans with wooden spoons and shakers made from tubs with dry rice or lentils.

Each type of instrument was given its own distinct rhythm from the following phrases which were then united together in harmony: 'Room for everyone at the table', 'One tree many branches' and 'More unites us than divides us'. We were then divided into breakout rooms with the following question to answer in small groups, 'How does making music together create community, connectedness, interfaith and unity in diversity?' Some of the responses included:

- Music is a universal language, it harmonises us as a community and creates a connection without barriers
- Music touches us all at the deepest level of our emotions

- It needs no words to share the spirit
- Music is like our heartbeat
- We make a better sound if we listen to one another
- Each of us travels, dances, lives by our own rhythm. Putting it together into a group experience can be difficult and cacophonous but it can be a lot of fun!
- Connecting to the rhythm of life is a very spiritual journey



Dr Jane Bentley of ArtBeat

Participants were then asked to create a phrase which encapsulated the session and what had been shared in the small groups. The phrase would be made into a rhythm that could be played together in harmony. There were a lot of inspiring phrases which made for a fun participative experience. The feedback

from the event was wonderful and demonstrated the power of music to unite people from across the world: "That was great fun. Brilliant to see people from all over the world in a time where we have to stay apart", "I really enjoyed the sense of connection with everyone", "I've not seen so many happy faces for months!"

Interfaith Buddies

In October our national development officer attended the 'Four Nations Meeting' organised by the Inter Faith Network for the UK which brings together the national interfaith bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and N Ireland to share good practice. At the meeting The Inter Faith Network for the UK shared about a new scheme that they had launched for Interfaith Week called Interfaith Buddies which can be found at:

<https://www.interfaithweek.org/resources/inter-faith-week-buddies>

Taking inspiration from this scheme, we organised an event during Scottish Interfaith Week where people of different faiths could sign up and be assigned a buddy for a one-to-one online conversation. 24 people signed up from six faiths from the age of 21 - 87! Care was taken to match people up with someone from a different faith or denomination and the buddies were put into breakout rooms for 30 minutes to get to know one another. They had the option to enjoy the conversation as a 'one off' or they could decide to exchange contact details and meet again online and/or in person once

COVID restrictions were lifted. A number of questions had been prepared in advance as a conversation starter:

1. Did you grow up in your faith or belief or did you come to it later on?
2. Tell me a bit about your faith or belief journey.
3. What do you value about your faith in terms of its key tenets, beliefs or values?
4. What do you value about your faith in terms of the impact it has on your life?
5. What do you value about the other person's faith (once you have found out a bit about it!)
6. How would you describe your perfect day?
7. What would a perfect world look like to you?
8. In what ways does your faith encourage you to make the world a better place?

The event was a great success. Those in the breakout rooms reported on



returning that they had really enjoyed getting to know one another, many said that they would keep in touch and that they were keen for another event to be organised to share their experiences and meet a new buddy! The event also generated a lot of outside interest, with our national development officer and two of the buddies appearing on BBC Radio Scotland's Sunday morning show with Cathy McDonald to share their experiences. Due to the popularity of the event, another Interfaith Buddies event was held in December and then again in February as part of World Interfaith Harmony Week.

Women's Dialogue

Interfaith Scotland organised a women's dialogue for Scottish Interfaith Week entitled 'Connecting Women of Different Faiths, Beliefs and Cultures'. The event was hosted in partnership with Bridging the Gap, a Glasgow-based charity that supports refugees and asylum seekers and brings young people together to counter sectarianism. The keynote speaker was Roz Adams, a certified trainer with the Centre for Nonviolent Communication and Project Development Worker with Bridging the Gap. Roz was joined by two volunteers from Bridging the Gap, Katherine Longmuir, a Scottish Catholic, and Huda Jaber, a Sudanese Muslim, who spoke about their experiences of putting faith into action by connecting

with others. After the talks participants had an opportunity to spend time in small groups looking at the following questions: 'In

what ways does your faith community or life philosophy encourage you to connect to your deepest, best self... and what could you or your faith community do more of or differently?', and 'Does your faith community or life philosophy encourage you to connect with people from different faiths and cultures? Are there barriers and



challenges you face as women in this and how could you overcome these?'

You can watch the inspiring and insightful talks on Interfaith Scotland's YouTube Channel at

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLPFgG6omCaITqqoOt080HQRGQP1kXHwPg>

Scottish Interfaith Week: Local Interfaith Groups And Faith Communities

East Kilbride Interfaith Forum

The East Kilbride Interfaith Forum organised a meeting on Zoom for Scottish Interfaith Week entitled, 'Connecting with our Faith'. We are a small group of people mostly from the Baha'i and Christian communities and we are beginning to feel we know one another, even though this year we have only been able to meet online. We are also getting more confident in our Zoom skills and have become more

adventurous in using the technology. During this meeting we reflected on the importance of faith in our lives, listening to music, Scripture readings and poems, including the beautiful words of 'This is faith' by Ruhiyyih Khanum from the Baha'i community. We thought about some statistics about faith in Scotland before splitting into smaller groups to share with one another what faith meant to us. We finished with

a series of short readings reminding us that faith cannot be divorced from action. We have enjoyed our meetings on Zoom. They have enabled people to participate who perhaps might not have been able to make a physical meeting, although we have missed the opportunity to share tea and cake together.

Lindsey Sanderson

The West Lothian Faith Group

The West Lothian Faith Group held an event as part of Scottish Interfaith Week, to explore what each faith says about 'connecting', what 'connecting' means to members and how people have found ways to connect during the COVID-19 pandemic. Members representing the Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian faiths provided an input on this theme, looking at what connects us, for example standing united against oppression.

The contributions were interesting and thought provoking and there was some good discussion around the challenges and opportunities that COVID has brought. The group highlighted the strength of faith groups in reaching out to communities and providing support. COVID has offered a common goal and different groups have worked together during the crisis, with new connections being made. Although the challenges with moving online were

highlighted, it was also noted that online communication has allowed people to stay in touch. The group felt we must now keep up this momentum, stay connected and continue to work together and find new opportunities for partnership working.

Joanna Anderson

East Renfrewshire Faith Forum and Renfrewshire Interfaith Group

East Renfrewshire Faith Forum and Renfrewshire Interfaith Group organised two events during Scottish Interfaith Week. The first of those events was held on Armistice Sunday 8th November. This would be the third consecutive year of a United for Peace event, usually held in the Peace Garden in Barshaw Park, Paisley. However, because of COVID restrictions, this event was held virtually via Zoom. This did not lessen the number of faith traditions participating. Whilst the absence of community singing was felt, it did not

impair the messages given by the various faith traditions represented.

The second event was held via Zoom on Monday 9 November and was titled "And they came to live in Glasgow". Making the presentation was Angela Shapiro, a former member and chair of ER Faith Forum. Angela spoke eloquently and passionately about children who had been brought to Scotland as part of the Kinder Transport during WWII as they fled Nazi Germany and occupied territories. She gave

several specific examples of children who had settled in Glasgow, made to feel very welcome, and grew up to embark on successful careers which made a significant difference in their community and in Scotland. The conclusion was that Scotland has been welcoming of refugees for many years and, as a consequence, has benefited from doing so. This was a very engaging and interesting talk which ended with a question and answer session.

Douglas Yates

Faith and Belief (Dundee and Tayside)

We launched our new SCIO (Scottish Incorporated Charitable Organisation) successfully online with a good turnout of committee, interested parties and potentially new members. Formerly the Dundee Interfaith Association, we have now become 'FaB' – Faith and Belief (Dundee and Tayside). Our new name reflects our commitment to include belief as well as faith as we are open to Humanists and others of belief, who share our purposes. Together we share a commitment to what is the common good and especially the good of those who struggle. We have become more committed to action for social justice and to the promotion of human rights, human flourishing and the one human family. We hold that

faith without action is empty and that faith and belief is more than dialogue. So, we have laid down a challenge for ourselves!

Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland, was the speaker at our launch and showed her understanding of our aims. Her enthusiasm kindled our own enthusiasm about the opportunities that were opening up for us. Since then we have had another well attended online meeting where we heard in detail from Jacky Close of Faith in Community Dundee, an organisation that supports faith communities and others to tackle poverty and inequality in the city. Faith in Community Dundee has also

recently become a SCIO and my position as chairperson of Faith in Community Dundee and convener of FaB (Dundee and Tayside) will help towards building a synergy between faith and social action.

Dundee City Council has also adopted a Faith Covenant to help establish supportive relations between the local authority and faith communities across the city, providing an opportunity for all faith communities to engage more with the City Council. A liaison group will be established between the local authority and faith communities to oversee the implementation of the Covenant.

Gordon Sharp – convener

Glasgow City Council Forum of Faiths

The opportunity to develop and promote interfaith cooperation among the many faith groups represented in Glasgow is the primary aim of Glasgow City Council's Forum of Faiths. Chaired by The Rt Hon The Lord Provost of Glasgow, Councillor Philip Braat, the Forum has sought to re-establish itself after a number of organisational and staff changes, which meant that it had not met as frequently as had previously been the case. Making this progress even more difficult has been the problem of establishing contacts with faith representatives when places of worship have been closed or access to them severely restricted due to the current pandemic.

However, The Lord Provost was clear that the onset of the pandemic was reason to move quickly in having the Forum re-established without delay. Summarising this position, he said **"Over the past year, I have been involved in a number of initiatives, which have demonstrated to me how well we are working together as a city to combat the pandemic. Given the crucial role of faith groups in the**

response so far, and the need for us to support and share information, delaying meetings further was not an option."

During the online meeting that took place during Scottish Interfaith Week, the Forum discussed issues that included supporting mental health wellbeing, responding to urgent requests for food and assistance, and ascertaining how faith groups are managing to stay in touch with their communities. The Lord Provost was also keen to thank those who participated in the meeting for their efforts to date. **"I am fully aware that faith is important to many people at all times, and never more so than when faced with adversity. Given the extraordinary burden, which I know is presently being experienced by faith groups and those who lead them, I wanted to personally share with them my appreciation and**



**The Rt Hon The Lord Provost of Glasgow,
Councillor Philip Braat**

gratitude for all they have done and continue to do."

If you are interested in finding out more about the work of Glasgow City Council's Forum of Faiths, please contact Alan.Speirs@glasgow.gov.uk

Edinburgh Interfaith Association

For Scottish Interfaith Week 2020 we asked our faith communities to contribute a short video: released daily for our EIFA's 'Behind the scenes' virtual tour series on YouTube. These videos educated on faith buildings, and vibrant faith communities in Edinburgh and the surrounding areas. There were some great videos that were well received which you can watch here:

<https://youtu.be/hVpu1wVDP1Q>

On the morning of 11 November we hosted our annual 'Religious Leaders and Faith Representatives Conference'. We explored the topic of 'Finding Hope During the Pandemic' with contributions from Professor Jason Leitch CBE, the National Clinical Director of the Scottish Government and Dr Gwenetta D. Curry, Lecturer in Race, Ethnicity, and Health at the Usher Institute, University of Edinburgh. The conference explored the effects of the COVID pandemic on faith communities and ethnic minorities, shared learning in responding to the pandemic, and how to tackle the inequalities which the pandemic has highlighted. Attendees enjoyed consulting with each other, sharing learnings at this difficult time, and appreciated the opportunity to ask questions of and have their voices heard by Professor Leitch and Dr Curry. They expressed the desire to meet on a more regular basis.

On the evening of 11 November EIFA held the second in our 'Reimagine' series; 'Reimagining Community', with Ruth Harvey, leader of the Iona community and Professor Cliff Hague, Chair of the Cockburn Association. This event highlighted the different challenges in maintaining community in both rural and urban settings. Ruth gave a perspective on the challenges to maintaining community during the pandemic, whilst Cliff highlighted the challenges that festivals, and the impact of over

tourism on housing availability, can bring to community.

On the evening of 12 November EIFA Executive Director, Iain Stewart chaired an Interfaith Conversation about the pandemic with Imam Razawi, of the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society who were the events hosts, the Most Rev Mark Strange, Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, Archbishop Rev Leo Cushley, Roman Catholic Archbishop, and the Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the Church of Scotland. All leaders were very open on the challenges that COVID had brought to them personally, and to their congregations. They shared lessons from COVID which included the fact that online worship had provided a space for people to reconnect with their faith and community who may have previously lost that physical connection, and the need to take account of that as places of worship begin to reopen.

Interfaith Conversation on the COVID-19 Pandemic with Scottish Religious Leaders -

https://youtu.be/3TitKCU-w_8

Finally, Interfaith Insights premiered its 30th episode with recent highlights episodes on, 'We Are One Race' (featuring an inspiring Jewish led project for young people in Rwanda),

<https://www.facebook.com/122672657791731/videos/705197443441534>

'Work Life Balance (tips on how to achieve it)', www.facebook.com/122672657791731/videos/272344284200222

'Educating for Change' (vice-convenor of Education committee Alison Dickie and anti-racism activist Debora Kayembe, most recently elected as the Lord Rector of Edinburgh University). This Interfaith Insights show was our "Interfaith Week Special", highlighting how we can decolonise education, and reform education in a way that both represents and celebrates our diverse society and communities.

<https://www.facebook.com/122672657791731/videos/813033969482232>

I end with the comments of one faith leader who attended all of the programmes: "I've learnt new things, met new people, and felt more connected and informed as a result of my engagement with EIFA's output. I've found programme output both challenging and nurturing, and it has encouraged me to think again about what it truly means to be in community, and in diversity with others, particularly at this difficult time."

Iain Stewart



Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group

Individuals from Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group had taken part in Interfaith Scotland's Postcards for Solidarity project and decided to extend this valuable experience to others in our area. We planned an event for Scottish Interfaith Week on the theme of 'Connecting'. We began with a presentation of readings on the theme both from scriptures and other sources, interspersed with slides showing ways of connecting which included a group of carol singers and some very muddy young men helping each other through an obstacle course! Participants then created their own Haiku on the theme of 'Connecting'. A Haiku is a short poem, originally from Japan, with 17 syllables. The haiku produced ranged from gratitude for the technology which allows us to connect in these difficult times, to deep spiritual awareness of the fundamental importance of connecting and the unifying value which is often displayed. A couple of examples are:



Zooms are electric
They bond hearts through waves and smiles
Sending real meetings.

Let your hearts and minds
Burn with loving kindness
For all who cross your path.

We also created a 'word cloud' showing the array of words chosen to express our thoughts. The event itself was an excellent example of connecting, both with friends already known and new ones discovered.

Jan Lethbridge

Faiths Together Skye and Lochalsh



Extracts from "Creatively Connecting Gallery"

Faiths Together Skye and Lochalsh have been connecting online through creativity during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The group assembled an online gallery showcasing their poems, stories and artwork for Scottish Interfaith Week. These can be found at <https://scottishinterfaithweek.org/listings/connecting-creatively-gallery-and-meet-the-artists-event> and we share a selection of these poems in the newsletter.

Moon Reflection 1

As I looked at the moon
last night,
behind the trees
it looked back at me
and said:

"See you tomorrow
same time, same place?
(well more or less)
I'll be here as usual!"
to which I reply:
"But will I?"

Moon Reflection 2

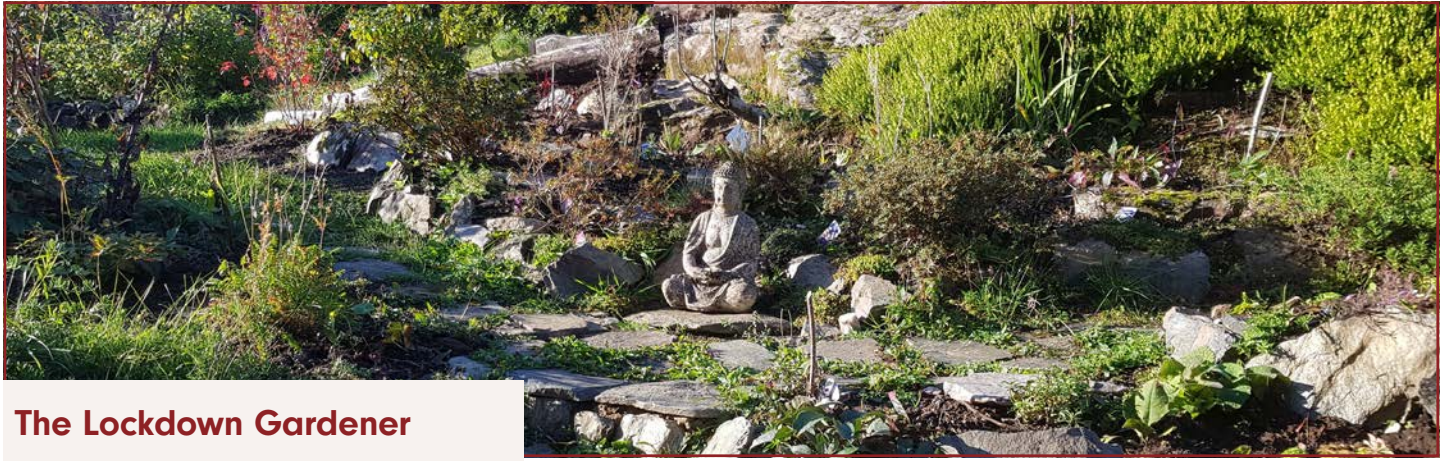
As I pull down the blind
at the end of the day,
I spot the full moon
playing hide and seek
behind the trees.

Wait for it...
...drum roll...curtain call
'Strike up the band!'
And out she flounces
revealing all.

Shameless hussy,
all showy and bright,
full of herself
and her nightly performances!
Oblivious to all else.

Next morning
a more sombre sister sun
- no less bright -
takes centre stage,
sets out on her eternal mission
to sustain all Life

Pat McNicol



The Lockdown Gardener

"Stay home" Nicola commanded.
 So I did. And that was fine by me.
 As the weeks passed, time, no longer linear,
 misbehaved and muddled itself into a soup.

Yet in the garden, time behaved itself.
 Seeds were sown, they germinated and grew,
 Taken care of lovingly each day,
 Until, with gratitude, eaten.

The grass grew, prompting me to mow.
 Cyclical events bringing reassurance.
 So I potted, aimlessly it seemed,
 Doing this for a while, then that.

One day, without any forethought,
 I moved the Buddha, then a stone.
 Then another stone, as if playing chess,
 There seemed to be rules.

Rules of symmetry, rules of balance.
 "Who's plan is this? Surely not mine."
 Suddenly it dawned upon me.
 "Yes, perhaps it is my plan."

Deep within my love of nature,
 Lying hidden all my life was
 my yearning to create a garden.
 So I surrendered and allowed it to take form.

At the edges, the tended order
 of the Buddha garden
 meets indigenous wildflowers,
 refugee plants and established trees.

I treasure the ordered
 and the haphazard
 in my long-held dream
 as it becomes physical reality.

My life's meandering path,
 through so many detours,
 has brought me here at last.
 "Thank you so much, COVID-19."

Lysana Robinson

Creation

Leaves of summer are my prayer flags,
 Dancing in the fragrant breeze.
 Every flutter, every flurry,
 Offers up a cry to Heaven,
 Offers up a silent whisper,
 Thanks and praise for all Creation.

Every moment is the moment
 Of creation, freshly new.
 Every living cell is vibrant,
 Humming with the Power that surges,

All-pervading, all-invading,
 Never ceasing, constantly.

Now: the moment of Creation;
 Here: the place and this: the power,
 Bursting forth in leaves and branches,
 Causing, making all appear.
 Now: the wondrous manifestation,
 The creation of Creation.

Maggie Manvell

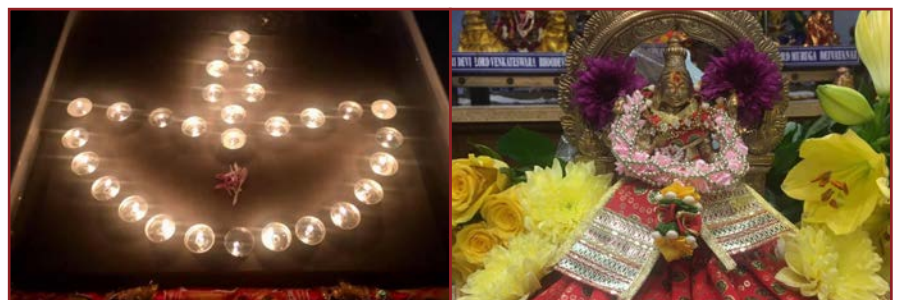
Connecting in the Hindu Way

To celebrate Scottish Interfaith Week and following the theme of 'Connection' the Hindu Temple of Scotland, Rutherglen, organised a Service programme entitled 'Deepa Jyothi - The Lights and Self-Realisation: Connecting in the Hindu Way' on 15 November. The Religious Service was held on Zoom and led by the Priest Dr Narasimhan Sampath Kumar who explained the scientific and philosophical context of lighting a 'Diya' Lamp and how that is related to sharing and spreading of knowledge of self and community. Supreme Knowledge will culminate

in 'Self Realisation and Oneness with the Supreme Soul which Hindus call Paramathma (God)'.

More than 20 Hindu devotees, people from other faiths and the Interfaith Scotland team joined the programme which also included a traditional song and dance by the children showcasing the theme of Deepa Jyothi - The Connection. The Hindu Temple of Scotland is delighted to have been a regular participant in Scottish Interfaith Week for more than eight years. The service is available to view here:

<https://youtu.be/5J-DDRtQn1E>



Music in the Time of Anne Frank

SCoJeC (The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities) hosted a concert of Music in the Time of Anne Frank during Scottish Interfaith Week. The performer was Fulbright Scholar Deborah Nemko of Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts who performed live streamed from the Telefunken Elektroakustik studios in Connecticut, USA. On the eve of the anniversary of the Nazi pogrom of Kristallnacht, she brought to life the long-lost compositions of victims and survivors of the Nazis, featuring piano works by Daniel Belinfante and Fania Chapiro, two Dutch-Jewish composers whose lives were forever changed by the invasion. Marking the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, the concert also recalled the young girl who left her mark on the world through her diary of observations and collected thoughts

while in hiding in the "Secret Annex" in Amsterdam. Deborah said: "It is hard not to be inspired by courage and wisdom of a child named Anne Frank. ... By performing and presenting piano compositions written around the time of the most famous young victim of the Holocaust, I hope to promote an understanding not only of

the difficulties Jewish musicians faced composing, sometimes in hiding, but also the monumental spirit of Jews whose voices would not be stifled in the darkest of times."

An extract of the concert can be found at <https://youtu.be/fbd4NFihUCg>



"We Were There Too": Remembering Jewish soldiers of the First World War

We Were There Too is a unique cross-community project created to capture, record, and preserve the impact, experience, and contribution of Britain's Jewish communities during the First World War era. SCoJeC was honoured to host an online event during Scottish Interfaith Week in collaboration with the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre. Rodney Ross and Alan Fell introduced the digital archive and interactive website at the centre of the project, which will become a permanent record of the lives of Jewish men, women, and families from 1914 to 1919, with details of their military and Home Front activities, ensuring that their stories are not lost for future generations. They also showed a short film of General Allenby entering Jerusalem in December 1917, explaining that he dismounted from his horse just outside the Jaffa Gate, in order to enter the city not as a conqueror but as a pilgrim.

Harvey Kaplan, Director of the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre, said that



around 1,500 Scottish Jewish people served in the military during the First World War, and that the Archives has records of memorials to 126 of those who lost their lives. He spoke about the lives of some Scottish Jewish people who served in the military and showed a number of artefacts that have been donated to the Archives Centre by their families. Dianna Wolfson, former President of Glasgow Jewish Representative Council and former

Convener of Interfaith Scotland, shared the story of her grandfather, Hatzkell Tchureczinsky, who was a private in the 4th Battalion Scottish Rifles, the Cameronians, and was killed in Flanders in 1917 at the age of 29. Dianna also read part of Laurence Binyan's moving poem For the Fallen. You can watch an extract of the event here:

<https://youtu.be/WGMuiXzwwoE>

Scottish Interfaith Week: Other Organisations

The Role of Faith in promoting positive mental health

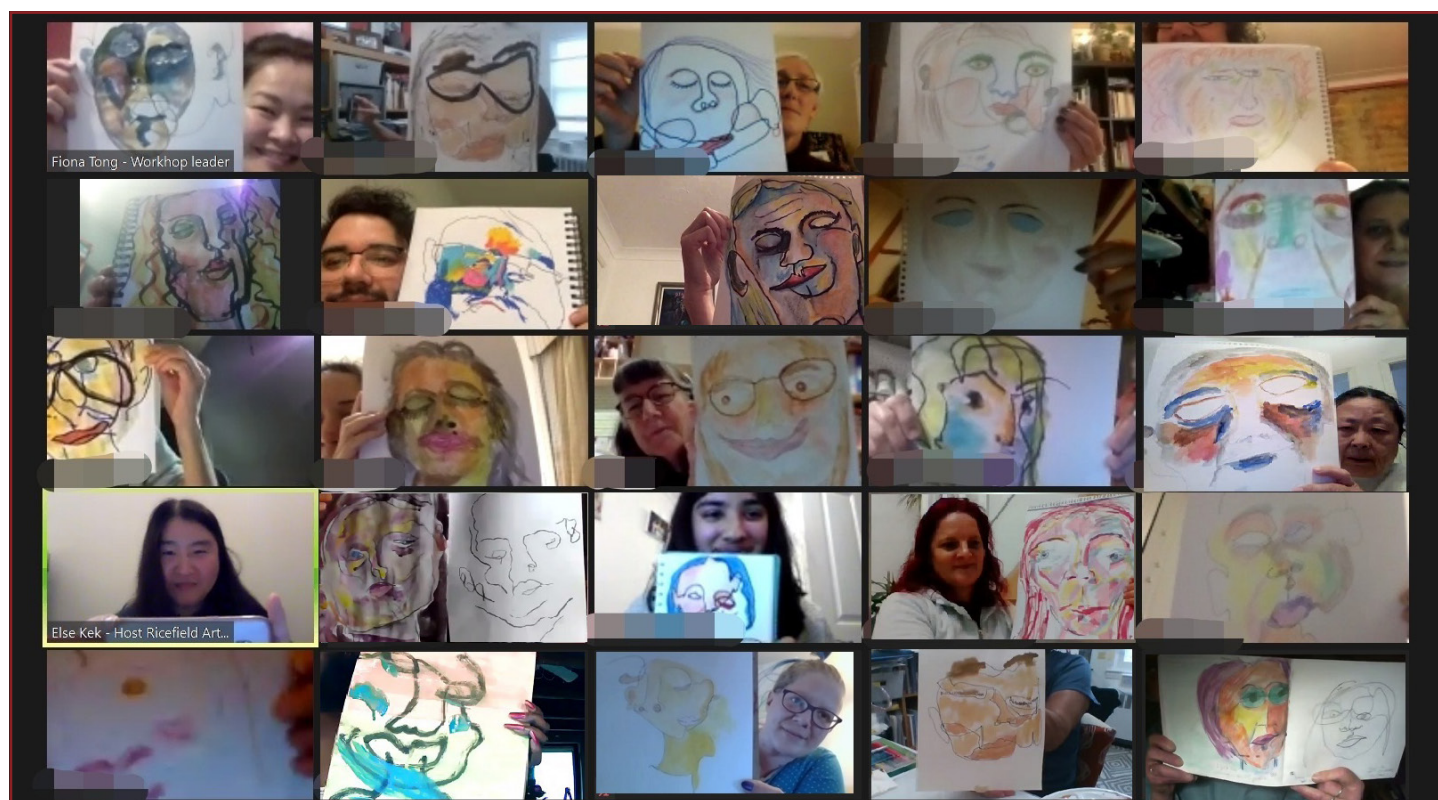
It can be difficult not to become anxious in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, a degree of concern is necessary for us to take the required precautions and protect ourselves, those we love and those who live in our neighbourhood. A webinar was organised on 10 November in collaboration with Interfaith Scotland with the aim of bringing people of all faiths together to learn how they can use their faith to maintain hope and

peace of mind. The topic of the event was "The role of Faith in promoting positive mental health". A symposium was presented by 10 guest speakers from different faiths. It included representatives from our student-led Napier Christian Union society and Islamic society. A student from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints used his creativity through dance to present a message of hope. A member of the Baha'i faith presented a

song with the words 'Gather all people beneath the shadow of Thy bounty and cause them to unite in harmony, so that they may become as the rays of one Sun, as the waves of one ocean and as the fruit of one tree'. The event was broadcast live through the Edinburgh Napier Students' Association YouTube channel and can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/kCuT6-oHSR4>

Ankit Duggal

Connecting with Yourself: Self Portrait Workshop



Ricefield Arts and Cultural Centre delivered a Blind Drawing Workshop on 11 November 2020, in celebration of Scottish Interfaith Week. The workshop led by artist Fiona Tong was attended by over 80 participants from diverse religious communities and cultures. In this art workshop, participants were guided to blindly

drawing a self-portrait with their eyes closed, while one hand touching the contours of their faces, and the other hand drawing what it felt like at the same time. This technique allowed participants to relax their mind and connect with themselves without worrying or being too cautious of the final outcome. Participants were all

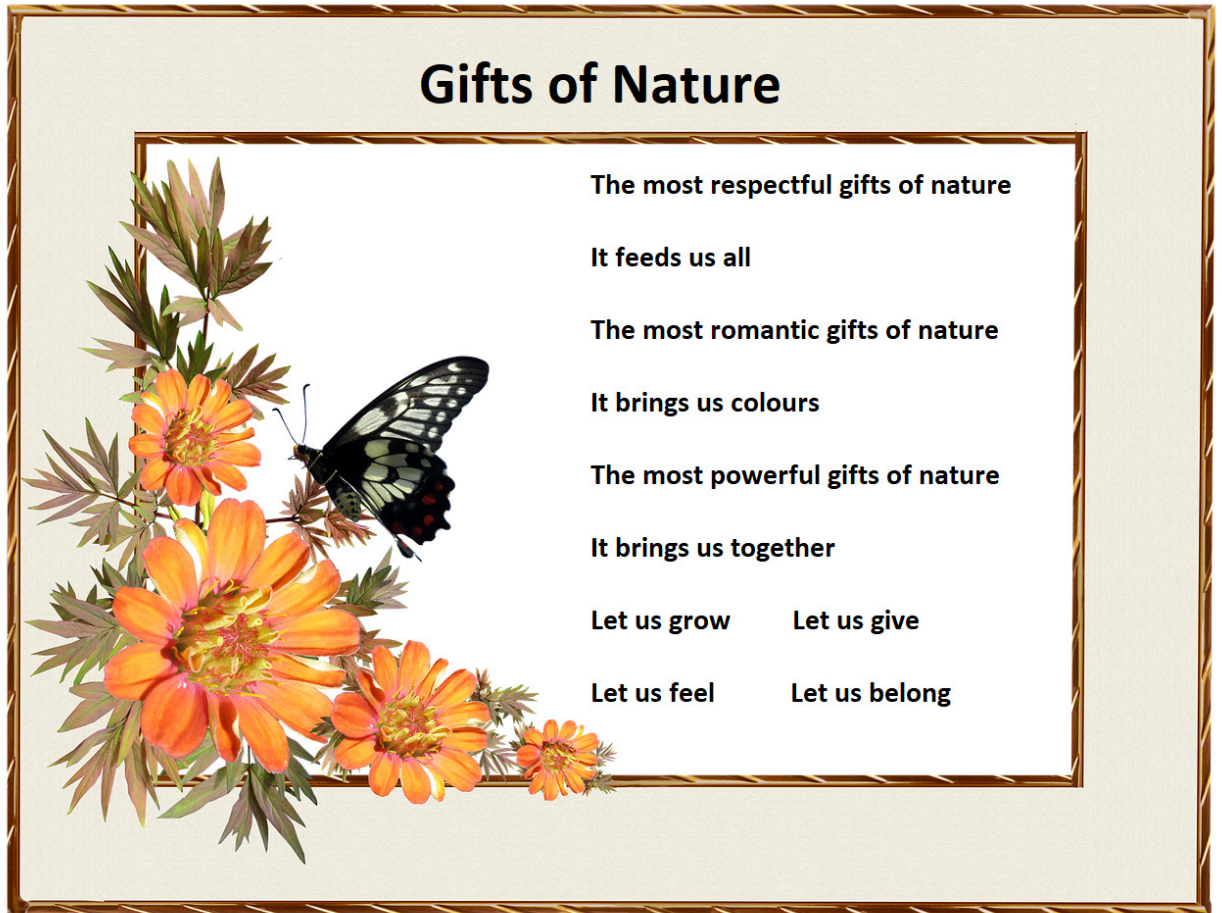
proud with their own self-portrait, and this exercise has shown that everyone has a creative side, and sometimes unintentional best results come when we allow our senses to flow without strain.

Else Kek

Songs of Love, Faith, and Connection

Citizen Songwriters delivered an inter-cultural Songwriting Workshop on 10 November 2020 on the theme of love, faith, and connection to celebrate Scottish Interfaith Week. The session was facilitated by two music practitioners, Alex Summerson and Sam Slatcher.

Participants were shown the 'Golden Rule of World Religions' poster and were asked to select their favourite quote(s) from a religion other than their own. Everyone worked together to select some inspiring words from the quotes, and 'nature', 'love', 'connect', 'belong', and 'give', were among the words chosen. Participants were given



10 minutes to write their own lyrics inspired by the words selected. The fun came when the facilitators guided participants to try different musical genres based on the lyrics. Everyone

had a great time building the melodies and trying to sing along using different rhythms on a song "Gifts of Nature" written during the workshop.

Else Kek

Dundee arts leaders and academics discuss the power of culture to unite faiths

Dundee's Al-Maktoum College successfully hosted its first online Symposium exploring the power of art and culture to unite faiths on 12 November. The event featured leading lights in Dundee's arts and culture scene alongside highly regarded academics. With the Scottish Interfaith Week theme of 'Connecting', the event focused on how creative pursuits can build bridges between cultures, both locally and internationally. The Symposium was well attended, with around 30 people of all faiths and none joining the live online event from various parts of the world. Speakers

included Dr Mohamed A.H. Ahmed, Al-Maktoum Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, Trinity College Dublin; Jess Thorpe, Associate Director, Dundee Rep and Scottish Dance Theatre Limited; Gerry Higgins, Intercultural and Communication specialist and Ms Sarah Derrick, Head of Learning, Dundee Contemporary Arts.

Head of College, Dr Abi Abubaker said, *"This is the fifth in our series of annual Building Bridges symposiums, which over the years have played an important part in Scottish Interfaith Week. Arts and culture can be an*

immense force for good in uniting faiths, and the College was excited to host such an event that celebrates the power of culture to bring people together".

Al-Maktoum College is a privately funded independent college of higher education situated in Dundee, Scotland. It offers a range of courses including Business Studies, and Management and Leadership, to specialist subjects including Islamic finance, Arabic Language, and Islamic Studies.

Introduction to Religious Approaches to Palestine Israel in Judaism, Christianity and Islam

The Forum for Discussion of Israel and Palestine (FODIP) hosted an online seminar for Scottish Interfaith Week. Dr Jane Clements, a Christian, Rabbi Warren Elf from the Jewish tradition, and Sadia Akram, a Muslim, shared a basic introduction to each of their faith traditions, their diversity and the history and background of each in the region. They talked about their relation to the Holy Land and why it is important to them and their faith. The online session is on YouTube and can be viewed at:

<https://youtu.be/ous5AKdbP2U>

FODIP is a registered charity that pursues positive dialogue between the Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities in the UK on the subject of Israel and Palestine through

facilitating dialogue, developing programmes to build and improve positive relations between members of the three communities, with a particular focus on young Muslims, Jews and Christians; leading inter-faith study tours to the Holy Land; and arranging training seminars and workshops on Israel and Palestine for those with a professional need to have a good understanding of the historic and current

situation there. If you would like more information please contact admin@fodip.org.uk. Follow us on twitter @fodip; Instagram @fodipofficial and Facebook @fodip



Contemplative Practices across the Faiths

Most faiths will have some sort of contemplative practice to offer: Christian contemplative song, Buddhist meditation or Muslim prayer beads. People who do not follow a religious faith might look for stillness and inspiration in nature or in a poem. Contemplation might take many different forms: sitting mindfully in a sunny spot letting one's thoughts settle, quietly allowing a scripture to unfold its meaning, or singing a heartfelt hymn. All contemplative practices have in common a turning inward, a moving towards stillness and an opening up to an unknown that is beyond our everyday agitation, thinking and planning.

During Scottish Interfaith Week a group of half a dozen gathered for a zoom meeting to explore the topic together. Participants commented from a Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Baha'i and Buddhist perspective. During a discussion intriguing questions were raised: is contemplation a thoughtful reflection or an intuitive feeling? Is it



something you do for half an hour in the evening or something that is lived throughout the day? Is it leading to the experience of the Sacred outside me or is it an expression of the Sacred within me? Even though more questions were raised than could be answered, it was clear that there was a sense of a shared ground at the heart of contemplative practices across different faiths.

For all those who want to explore this topic further, www.cherrytreelodge.net

is a retreat centre in West Fife, which is planning to launch a contemplative hut project. It will provide a social media platform for people interested to share and learn practices and paths. It is also in the planning stages to create the opportunity for individuals or small groups to stay in huts tucked away in nature and follow the contemplative practice that nourishes you.

If you would like to know more or get involved please contact Till at markandtill@cherrytreelodge.net

Connecting with CARES for greener faith buildings

With COP26 heading to Glasgow later this year and a focus on a green recovery from COVID-19, Scotland's ambition to reach net-zero by 2045 is high on the agenda. Faith groups across Scotland may be wondering what part they can play. As beacons of the community, faith buildings are well-placed to demonstrate and normalise energy efficiency and



renewable energy technologies. The Scottish Government's Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES), managed by Local Energy Scotland, can help with that. CARES provides funding and support to communities, faith groups, rural businesses and other organisations to develop renewable energy projects.

CARES hosted a webinar during Scottish Interfaith Week where we talked through the support available from CARES and we invited guest speakers from Inverness Masjid and the Iqra Learning Centre in Glasgow to talk about the projects that we helped to fund and support. Both the Inverness Masjid and the Iqra Learning Centre aim to reduce their running costs and

their carbon footprint with the solar PV that has been installed.

CARES isn't just about providing funding. We have a dedicated team of local development officers based across Scotland who are available to help and support you to turn your project idea into a reality. We also have a range of resources on our website to help you plan your project. If you missed it, you can watch the recording of the event on our YouTube channel and to find out more about CARES and the support currently available please visit our website www.localenergy.scot or contact us on 0808 808 2288.

Laura Campbell, Partnership Manager, Local Energy Scotland

Kidney Research UK Webinar

Kidney Research UK hosted a virtual multi-faith webinar on Wednesday 11 November during Scottish Interfaith Week. With lockdown enforced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Scottish peer educator project funded by the Scottish Government has taken a new virtual approach. The multi-faith webinar is the latest in a series delivered by the Scottish peer educator team. Their project, now in its eighth year, focuses on raising awareness amongst the South Asian (Sikh, Hindu and Muslim) communities of Glasgow, Edinburgh and surrounding areas on kidney health, disease and the new change of law on organ and tissue donation which will come into force on 26 March 2021 in Scotland. The multi-faith webinar consisted of faith leaders /ambassadors - Dr Arvind Singh (Hindu), Mr Surjit Chowdhary MBE (Sikh), Shaykh AbdalAziz (Muslim), Rabbi David Rose (Jewish) and Dr Murdo MacDonald (Christian) each discussing faith perspectives on organ donation. Dr Radha Sundaram, ICU consultant, Royal Alexander Hospital, Glasgow spoke about the procedures following death

and organ donation and Ewen Maclean, secretary and acting chairman of Scottish Kidney Federation spoke about his personal journey through living with kidney failure and transplantation.

Myths, misconceptions and understanding faith perspectives are amongst the major barriers within the communities and the webinars have been addressing these issues. Bushra Riaz, Scottish peer educator coordinator at Kidney Research UK explains, *"Our team has been working closely with Scottish faith leaders, community members and external stakeholders to plan, host and deliver webinars with a range of speakers to highlight the project aims regarding kidney health and disease, organ donation within South Asian and Scottish communities. These are being very well received and are well attended."*



All webinars have been recorded and are available to view on the Kidney Research UK website at <https://tinyurl.com/czu23mmt>

All households in Scotland will receive a leaflet explaining the change of law to an opt out system and information on the process of organ donation. These are also available in 23 translated languages online at <https://www.organdonationscotland.org/resources>

For more information about organ and tissue donation and the opt out system visit www.organdonationscotland.org

Interfaith Glasgow

Voices from the Portal: Reimagining our Post-Pandemic World

Interfaith Glasgow's team have been hard at work over the past six months to deliver Voices from the Portal: Reimagining our Post-Pandemic World - a monthly dialogue series tackling a range of issues which have been highlighted by this pandemic. Why a portal? We took inspiration from Indian writer Arundhati Roy, who describes pandemics themselves as portals - a new world to enter:

"Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred... our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it."

Roy's analysis offers hope in the darkest of times; it encourages us to think to the future - what can we change and what should we leave behind? We identified six burning issues that could be addressed differently in the post-pandemic world: racism, hunger, altruism, mental health, climate change and the future of religious practice. With expert speakers from across the globe and rich audiences full of voices from diverse communities, we explored what we have collectively learned during the pandemic and what we would like to change as we move towards this new future.

"It was good to hear from various speakers in relation to a pertinent issue that is being discussed worldwide at the moment. It was especially interesting to hear the topic of racism being discussed from a religious perspective."

'Eradicating Hunger: Do our Food Systems Need Rethinking?' was our first event in September and an opportunity to explore activism surrounding food justice, in particular the campaign for a reform of our food system. Key themes were dignity, the protection of our planet, and the inclusion of marginalised communities in driving change.

'Racism and Religion: Where do we Go from Here?' took place during National Hate Crime Awareness Week and Black History Month and was a chance to address an issue which has permeated news, culture, and thought throughout 2020. Inspired by Angela Davis' statement that "In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be antiracist", we asked: what does antiracism look like in practice and, in particular, what does it look like for people of faith? Three speakers [pictured] from Chicago, Glasgow and Sheffield also reflected on how certain interpretations of religions might have contributed to the problem and how people of faith can contribute to solutions.

'Keeping the Kindness: How Do We Nurture Community Spirit?' explored how we ensure the altruism

instigated by the pandemic remains in place. Since the start of the pandemic, there have been many extraordinary acts of kindness, with examples from across the globe of individuals and community groups going the extra mile to reach out to and take care of those around them. Speakers and participants had the opportunity to think about some of their favourite examples of 'kindness' and find the commonality of altruism in all faiths. One participant said that this "opened my eyes to other faiths and beliefs and that, at the end of day, we all strive for the same goals in life. To be kind, to assist where needed and to cherish moments and memories."

'Climate Crisis: How do we Get Off the Road to Ruin?' was an opportunity to look at a topic which, despite the pandemic, remains incredibly urgent for human life. We asked - how can we motivate ourselves, and what action can people from diverse faith and belief communities take that will really make a difference? We heard from two impressive activists who, inspired by their faith, offered us advice on how to reorientate our relationship with nature, and how to mobilise an interfaith climate movement. Building this movement will be crucial as we look forward to COP26 in Glasgow in November this year.



Calvin Taylor (Interfaith Youth Core), Mahrukh Adnan Shaukat (AMINA Muslim Women's Resource Centre), and Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal OBE (City of Sanctuary).

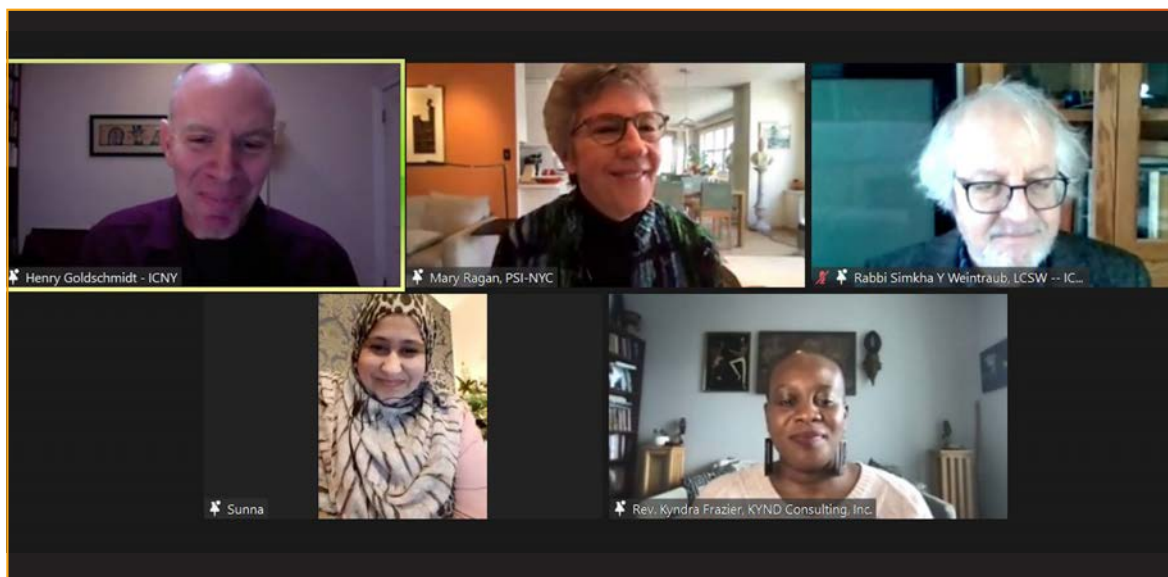
'Faith and Mental Health: How do we Create Communities of Care?'

was delivered in January in partnership with the Interfaith Center of New York and the Psychology and Spirituality Institute featuring speakers with expertise in mental health support from diverse faith perspectives.

A guest relished the "opportunity to listen to wonderful speakers with their points of view, sharing what is needed and what they are doing."

This event had attendees tuning in from all corners of the globe, from Melbourne to Saudi Arabia, from Paris to California.

'The Future of Religion: How has the Pandemic Changed the Ways we Practise?' was our final event marking World Interfaith Harmony Week and was delivered with the Interfaith Center of New York and Cape Town Interfaith



Top row: Dr Henry Goldschmidt (Interfaith Center of New York), Dr Mary Ragan, LCSW (Psychotherapy and Spirituality Institute), Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW.
Bottom row: Sunna Kaleem (Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society), Revd Kyndra Frazier, LCSW (KYND - Knowing Yourself In Need of Devotion)

Initiative. Together with 80 participants from across the Atlantic and beyond, we reflected on this together. A panel of religious leaders from New York and Cape Town reflected on the preliminary findings of the Manchester based research project 'British Ritual Innovation under COVID-19.' After this event, one participant expressed: "the insights and perspectives of the different faith-representatives simply

show how very similar we all are and reaffirmed the interdependent web of all existence."

Thank you to everyone who has helped contribute to a clearer vision of a better post-pandemic world. Now, let's work together to bring it into being!

Nikki Barnett and Katie Sproull

Central Scotland Interfaith Group

Central Scotland Interfaith came into existence around 10 years ago to cover the local authority areas of Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling. The initial enthusiasm saw meetings with anything between 4 and 60 people attending, meeting in members' homes so people of different faiths could appreciate the variation in lifestyles enjoyed by the hosts. The Provosts of both Falkirk and Stirling provided hospitality for public meetings and a close relationship was fostered. Members were invited to talk to classes in several schools and to speak at places of worship about interfaith matters. A multi-faith One World Week service was held in a local Church with participants from

Baha'i, Christian, Muslim and Sikh traditions.

However as key members became more involved with responsibilities in their own faith communities, attendance at, and frequency of, meetings tailed off, and CSI became a virtual entity publicising interfaith events rather than initiating them. Around this time, Stirling Methodist church started an occasional Sunday evening event where people brought some food for a bring and share meal, followed by sharing thoughts, readings, songs, pictures and other ways to reflect on a previously chosen theme. This was given the name "Soul Space" and attracted participants from several

faith communities.

Covid-19 lockdown prevented gathering in Stirling for a meal, but we went online and monthly Zoom meetings replaced the physical gatherings early last year. We managed one socially-distanced face to face meeting in a member's garden in the summer, before we had to return to Zoom. Since then we have gathered together to share thoughts on fire, connecting, birds, closeness and love. We have been delighted that being online means we are able to welcome folk from outwith Central Scotland to our monthly meetings.

Andrew Sarle

Aberdeen Interfaith Group

2020 has been a critical year - a year of crisis (the word made up in Chinese of two brushstrokes - 'danger' and 'opportunity.')

For many it has been a very dangerous year, with risk of the virus, death from the virus, loss of work because of the virus and loss of freedom to travel, to meet and to worship. On the other hand 2020 has given us opportunities, to spend more time with family, to use technology to the full, to use less fossil fuel, to appreciate God's creation and to have more time for prayer and meditation. For our Interfaith Group it meant that we could not meet together physically, which was a real problem for those who do not have the technology. It meant for a start and even now, that people had and have enough to worry about with their families and work to concern themselves with meetings and we understand this completely. No extra pressure needed to be put on folk than what they were or are already having to endure. Checking in on members who were missing was important so that they felt they were being remembered.

It soon became apparent that a different kind of gathering for reflection rather than our usual business meetings would be more appropriate to people's needs. We are grateful to Dumfries and Galloway and Central Scotland Interfaith Groups for their 'Food for the Soul' and 'Soulspace' events. We decided to host our own events taking on a different theme

for reflection each time, including Gratitude, Sleep, Time, Community and Waiting. We also took the opportunity to adapt meetings which we had planned on Climate Change, our Mindfulness Day on Sleep and our Interfaith Forum on Gender Based Violence to Zoom allowing us to have local, national and global speakers, without any travel or expenses involved.

Sometimes there were brand new chances given, such as to Anish, a school pupil, who had prepared a survey/questionnaire on COVID and Spirituality, sent it out to members and prepared a report which he spoke to us about and we discussed together. Two quotes from respondees are worth sharing: **"Change is the only constant. Enjoy every moment"** and **"a humbling experience to make us realise that not everything is under our control."** Following the death of the late Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, our Jewish friend, Debby Taylor shared thoughts from the Lord Provost of Aberdeen, shared the video of him receiving his honorary Doctorate at Aberdeen University, and led us in a discussion of his speech on that occasion. Our Buddhist colleague was fascinated by the man and his powerful words: **"Keep Learning, Failure makes us grow and Faith is the Courage to take a risk"** - very apt words for us at this time and season.

These months have been a steep

learning curve for quite a lot of us, but it has been great to be able to use the gifts and talents of our technological colleagues to set up Zoom for us and help us develop our skills in its use, so much so, that we were given the honour of sharing our experience of using Zoom for interfaith events at a webinar organised by the UK Interfaith Network. How far we have come in less than a year, with 13 meetings online and different people attending from as far away as Skye and Orkney and Dumfries and Galloway. January saw us sharing some New Year reflections to hang on the lit willow tree and recording a Zoom Interfaith Holocaust Memorial Day event on the 2021 theme: Be the light in the darkness with 13 different faiths represented. This is available on Youtube at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQ7a5fvHv1UBeVmpRikOb0JGWCXNuN3IY>

We are very grateful for the initial meetings organised by Interfaith Scotland to bring us together from different groups and to the charity Faith in Community Scotland for hosting regular meetings for sharing, building up and encouraging one another in meeting and serving our local communities. Without these national Zoom gatherings we would not have been so inspired and determined to keep going.

Patricia Finlay



Some clips from the Aberdeen Zoom Interfaith Holocaust Memorial Day event which is available on YouTube

Shetland Interfaith Group

Shetland's annual commemoration to mark Holocaust Memorial Day this year took the form of encouraging local folk to join us in joining the UK national ceremony which was for the first time streamed online. Following the national ceremony, at 8pm we encouraged people throughout Shetland to Light the Darkness together with other households across the UK by lighting candles and safely putting them in their windows to remember those who were murdered for who they were, and to stand against prejudice and hatred today.



Our annual commemoration ceremony usually concludes with the laying of wreaths of remembrance at the County War Memorial by representatives from a variety of Shetland organisations and

groups. As we felt that would not be appropriate this year, Radina McKay, Chair of Shetland Inter Faith, quietly placed a single wreath there during the day to provide a visible reminder of our remembrance of the past and

commitment to a better future together.

Radina McKay



Women of Faith and Community

Women of Faith and Community is a group which, in normal times, meets once a month in the West End of Glasgow. There are Muslims and Christians (from a range of denominations), a sprinkling of other religions and also the "not very sure". Over a number of years, the regulars have become very fond of each other, welcoming each on arrival with a warm hug and a cup of tea. That of course was in normal times. What to do in lockdown?

There is always concern regarding the use of social media where the membership includes people without access to this form of communication. Will setting up a WhatsApp group exclude some and create an "us and them" culture? Abida Farid, the

wonderful and warm-hearted leader of Women of Faith and Community was very aware of the risks but decided on balance to use WhatsApp while keeping in regular touch by phone with those who might otherwise feel isolated.

The WhatsApp group has shared joys and sorrows over the period since the first lockdown. There was a birth, a reason to welcome new life and to wish the parents great happiness in raising this very precious child born in a pandemic. Prayers were requested for those who were ill, known and unknown. Images which raised the spirits, videos of young people singing so beautifully about "the new jab" and even some jokes pinged into our homes. The group was greatly

shocked by the news in December that an accident tragically took the life of the husband of one of our greatly loved members. Immediately messages of sympathy and concern were shared by the group and flowers sent.

We think of our youngsters, thumbs flicking with a speed that amazes us and sometimes we are worried that they will lose the ability to talk across a table. However, we have to agree that WhatsApp has kept our group together although we are weary for the day when we can put our arms around each other again and let memories of a virus slip away.

Alison Spurway



Fife Interfaith Group's 9th Annual Interfaith Lecture took place on Zoom on 11 November. The first speaker was Sarah Keeble, who founded the Fife-based organisation S.H.I.E.L.D at the beginning of the pandemic to support those in need, providing meals to people alone at home with children and to OAPs. From March to November, the organisation cooked 56,000 meals from free food, supplied by the Co-op and Fair Share, that would otherwise have been thrown away. They now cater to over 900 people, including children, every week. S.H.I.E.L.D originally used the kitchen of Dunfermline Central Mosque and have now secured premises in a bungalow in Fife College. They also supply cleaning products, nappies, toothbrushes, tinned food, toilet rolls, hot chocolate and pet food. Anne-Marie Smith of Fife Council then gave a talk about mental health with tips for how to improve your own mental health. This is part of Fife Council's strategy to take proactive steps to increase the mental wellbeing of people of all ages. Anne-Marie recommended ten steps to improve

your mental health: Keep active, take a break, care for others, keep in touch, eat well, drink sensibly, do something you are good at, accept who you are, talk about your feelings, and ask for help. You can also visit the website www.clearyourhead.scot for further advice. Daryl Watson, Director of Communications for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered an entertaining quiz and dynamic talk about how to engage people, and particularly young people through social media to share positive messages and retain connections across generations.

The Equality team for Police Scotland generously donated six cherry trees to be planted in the Peace garden in Beveridge Park, Kirkcaldy, Fife. We had planted trees at this location on two previous occasions, but they were vandalised by local youth. The attached photo includes two members of the Equality team, PC Rebecca Tweedle and PC Kinga Miskiewicz. Cllr Judy Hamilton, and vice chairperson of the Fife Interfaith Group was also in attendance as well as representatives

from the Grounds Maintenance team and several FIG committee members. We are keeping our fingers crossed that the trees survive this time. The following thought came to mind as we prepared the ground. **"We plant peace in our hearts by showing forth tolerance, understanding, and compassion, and hope that we will witness its maturing in society at large"**.

The chairperson of FIG, Iain Liston, was invited to speak about interfaith dialogue on "The Voice of Islam" breakfast show on Thursday 26th November from 35 minutes in which is available to listen to at <http://voiceofislam.co.uk/shows/the-breakfast-show/>

Fife Interfaith Group was given a fascinating talk by Rev Christine Fraser, Canon of St Ninian's Scottish Episcopal Cathedral who shared her story of becoming a priest. A transcript of the talk is available on request from Fife Interfaith Group.



The Official UN Observance in the 1st Week of February

Faith Communities Serving Others Together



One of the most powerful ways to promote harmony and understanding is to ‘serve’ others together and during the global pandemic local faith communities, interfaith groups and community organisations across Scotland were supported by Interfaith Scotland to serve their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For World Interfaith Harmony Week 2021 we brought together many of the faith communities who worked so hard to support others in an online celebration of community service showcasing their wonderful work. We heard from eight inspiring projects – six faith communities, a local interfaith group and a local community project. Our keynote speaker was Charandeep Singh, the co-founder of the charity Sikhs in Scotland which set up the Sikh Food Bank during the pandemic providing over 100,000 meals to those in need. The Sikh Food Bank received the Prime Minister’s Points of Light Award and the Pride of Scotland Award and Charandeep was named in the Queen’s New Year honours list for services to charity. Charandeep shared that all aspects of the food bank project were multifaith and

multicultural, from the donors, to the volunteers and service users. As the project expanded Charandeep was delighted that Queens Park Baptist Church in Glasgow offered to take in and administer donated goods to the food bank, a truly interfaith effort in the city!

We then heard from several other faith-based community projects. Fiona Frank spoke on behalf of the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) which purchased a Zoom account which was able to hold meetings and events for large groups, including a Klezmer and Yiddish Song concert for which over 630 people registered. They have also been able to share the Zoom account with many other communal organisations for events and meetings.

Venerable Ajahn Sujana, the Abbot teacher at the Varapunya Meditation Centre in Aberdeen spoke about moving its activities online to reach out ‘live’ by broadcasting daily talks, chanting and meditation which have helped Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, locally, regionally, nationally and even internationally. Many have said that they are so grateful for the positive impact on their mental health and spiritual wellbeing, including many who have never been to the Centre! The Centre also secured a delivery of 400 face coverings from overseas which were offered widely for free across all the communities we have engaged with both at the Centre and online.

Rev Tembu Rongon, the priest at Holy Trinity Scottish Episcopal Church in Elgin shared ways in which he has



Top row: Aparna Ramesh (Interfaith Scotland), Frances Hume (Interfaith Scotland), Subbulakshmi Jagannathan (Hindu Temple of Scotland), Ajahn Sujana (Varapunya Meditation Centre)

Middle row: Dr Maureen Sier (Interfaith Scotland), Charandeep Singh (Sikhs in Scotland), Sonya Sier (producer and filmmaker), Nila Joshi (Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group)

Bottom row: Srihari Vallabhajousula (Hindu Temple of Scotland), Rev Tembu Rongon (Scottish Episcopal Church), Fiona Frank (SCoJeC), Tricia McConalogue (Bridging the Gap)

been able to help isolated members of his congregation feel included in the life of the parish. This included live-streaming church services and holding online weekly prayer group meetings and the church youth group on Zoom. For those without access to technology, leaflets with all the readings for the services and church notices were posted out. All of this is helping keep the congregation and wider community connected and involved when many were isolated, living alone and suffering from loneliness and anxiety.

Srihari Vallabhajousula and Subbulakshmi Jagannathan from the Hindu Temple of Scotland in Rutherglen spoke about supporting destitute Indian students with food parcels for a three month period at the start of the pandemic. Our Muslim speaker was unable to attend but we heard about the work of the Al-Khair Foundation, a Muslim charity that prepared cooked meals for the homeless, those shielding and unable to go out and

those who had lost their jobs due to the pandemic and were struggling to feed their families.

“Thank you very much for your daily reflections, beautiful chanting and guided meditations. It has given me ways to cope with anxiety and isolation during these challenging times.”

Local Interfaith Groups were also instrumental in supporting their local communities in Skye and Lochalsh, Aberdeen, Fife, Edinburgh, Glasgow and East Renfrewshire. At the event we heard from Nila Joshi from Edinburgh Interfaith Women's Group which supported the elderly, lonely, vulnerable and those with health issues during the pandemic. This assistance included providing basic food provisions, help with hospital appointments, picking up prescriptions and delivering medications to those isolated at home. The group also sewed 100 masks for Edinburgh Sick children hospital for visitors, parents and admin staff.

Many community organisations helped people at the grassroots level throughout the pandemic. One of these was Bridging the Gap, an organisation set up by the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church,

to support refugees and combat sectarianism between Protestant and Catholic young people in Glasgow. Tricia McConalogue, the Director of Bridging the Gap, spoke to us about providing practical support such as food and nappies to families that were struggling financially; online activities to connect people together such as cookery classes; and an art project called 'Pigeon of Hope' where origami pigeons were sent in the post with a stamped addressed postcard to send back to the project on which to fill in, "When we get back together we hope we can..."

After we had heard from the speakers, participants were divided into multifaith dialogue rooms to share with one another on, "What does your faith community have to say about serving others?" We then returned to the main room to hear from those who were helped by the projects outlined in the programme who shared the impact that the projects had on their lives.

All agreed that it was a truly inspirational evening and a short film giving a flavour of the talks can be viewed on Interfaith Scotland's YouTube channel.

Interfaith Buddies: Connecting Through Conversation

As Scotland endures another COVID-19 lockdown many people are experiencing 'lockdown loneliness'. For World Interfaith Harmony Week 2021, Interfaith Scotland hosted an Interfaith Buddies event to bring people together from diverse faith traditions, to build close bonds of friendship, harmony and understanding.

After an introduction to World Interfaith Harmony Week by Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland, two speakers gave a presentation on the theme of 'Connecting through Conversation'. Our first speaker was Trishna Singh, the founder and Director of the Sikh Family Support Charity, Sikh Sanjog, and Punjabi Junction, a café that is the first Sikh women's social enterprise in Scotland. At the start of lockdown, Sikh Sanjog acted fast to move its services online with weekly online well-being sessions and youth work sessions, culturally specific food parcels, online arts and craft sessions and an emergency befriending service with over 500 calls made to check in on the health and wellbeing of group members, young people and the elderly. Punjabi Junction also provided over 600 free hot meals to homeless people in Leith. Trishna said, **"As Scottish Sikhs we have much in common with our fellow Scots but it is only through conversations that barriers are broken and friendships are created. We see an increase in the number of people who are simply longing for more opportunities to make real one to one face to face connections with their fellow human beings be they from any race or culture. The staff at Sikh Sanjog have tried to reach out to as many**



people of different communities and backgrounds as possible."

Our second speaker was Anish Subramaniam, a school pupil from Aberdeen who shared the fascinating research that he had conducted with over 150 people from different backgrounds to find out more about their mental, emotional and spiritual health during the pandemic and ways in which people were connecting with one another, with online activities and showing acts of compassion in supporting others. A copy of the research is available on request from Interfaith Scotland.

Participants were then partnered with a person from a tradition other than their own and had the opportunity to explore what their faith tradition had to say about the World Interfaith Harmony Week themes of Love of God, Love of the good and Love of

neighbour. After the talks we heard very moving accounts from some of the buddy pairs who reflected upon their experiences. Rev Peter Gill, a Church of Scotland minister from Pakistan and founder of Renfrewshire Interfaith Group, was paired with Linsay Taylor, a Scottish Muslim and the current Chair of Interfaith Scotland. Peter and Linsay were moved and inspired by all that they shared in common on their faith journey.

It is envisaged that this event will support people during the global pandemic and beyond by creating opportunities for individuals from the grassroots of Scottish society to build a deep and meaningful friendship with someone from a faith tradition other than their own and that these friendships will last well beyond the pandemic and the Interfaith Buddies scheme will be built upon in the years to come.

Beyond Climate Crisis Series launched for World Interfaith Harmony Week 2021

The Beyond Climate Crisis series was inaugurated during World Interfaith Harmony Week with 'The Climate Crisis: Beyond Politics' panel discussion featuring distinguished guests, Ross Greer, Green MSP, Kat Jones, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, advisor to Sikhs in Scotland and Chair of Religions for Peace, UK Women of Faith Network.

The panel offered both an interfaith perspective along with key perspectives from the world of politics (with a small p). Go to Interfaith Scotland Facebook page to see the live engagement that took place. This first panel included Christian and Sikh panellists and future panellists will include Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and others. The Beyond Series will include The Climate Crisis: Beyond Religion; The Climate Crisis: Beyond Economics and The Climate Crisis: Beyond Science (along with many other 'beyonds'). It is hoped that this interfaith series will highlight that the climate crisis is beyond anything humanity has faced but that together we can make a difference.

Beyond Climate Crisis
facebook LIVE
24 February, 2pm

Join us live at Interfaith Scotland's [Facebook page](#) for a panel discussion on **The Climate Crisis: Beyond Politics** Featuring,
Ross Greer, Green Party MSP
Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Religions for Peace, UK Women of Faith Network
Kat Jones, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland

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Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society: Arbaeen Peace Walk

In October 2020 the Chairman of the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society Shabir Beg OBE organised Scotland's first ever Arbaeen Peace Walk. This is an annual event that is commemorated in Iraq between the cities of Najaf and Karbala.

It is the world's largest annual event hosting in excess of 15 million people from all over the world. The Arbaeen is the re-enactment of the walk carried out by Blessed Imam Hussain in the 7th century AD where he set out to help and support people who were living under an oppressive regime in the city of Kufa. Sadly, he was intercepted at Karbala and was martyred together with members of his family.

Volunteers from the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society participated in the Peace Walk which started at Paisley Abbey and concluded at the offices

of Interfaith Scotland in Glasgow. The main purpose of the Walk was to bring people together from many different faiths, charitable organisations as well as those of no particular religious affiliation. Amongst the many engagements en route included meeting Bishop John Keenan of St Mirren Cathedral, The Very Rev Dr Lorna Hood, representatives from Police Scotland, Rangers Charity Foundation, and Sikh and Hindu religious scholars at their temples. There was an extraordinary gathering at George Square which included representatives from Trades House, Merchants House as well as Glasgow's

Lord Provost Philip Braat.

It was an amazing day of unity and coming together of people from all walks of life. As the Walk was undertaken during the pandemic everyone adhered to the government guidelines on social distancing. It was with great pride that during Scottish Interfaith Week, SABS together with Interfaith Scotland's Director Dr Maureen Sier were able to communicate a summary of the Walk and its historical significance to a virtual audience which can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/OqSEziJZwO8>

Religions for Peace Report on the First Assembly on Women, Faith and Diplomacy: Keeping Faith and Transforming Tomorrow

The first Religions for Peace World Assembly on Women, Faith and Diplomacy in partnership with Ring for Peace and supported by the German Federal Foreign Office took place virtually from 10-13 November 2020 in Lindau, Germany.

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic over 600 participants including 250 religious leaders, diplomats, and civil society representatives from around the world gathered with a small number in-person and virtually. The assembly, titled "Keeping Faith and Transforming Tomorrow" focused on the nexus of women, faith and diplomacy, giving prominence to women's respective roles and contributions at the local, national and international level and highlighting their leadership. Prof Dr Azza Karam, Secretary General of Religions for Peace International, said that the goal of the assembly was to help attendees better "appreciate the breadth and the depth of contributions of women in the realms of faith and diplomacy across the world."

Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel opened the virtual assembly with a welcome address, stating that it was a "double joy" for the host nation, celebrating Religions for Peace 50th anniversary and the role of women in peace-building. "We must not leave room for extremists who, in their inhuman blindness, abuse religion to sow discord and undermine our peaceful coexistence," she said, and "peace is only durable if women are involved in the process." UN Secretary General António Guterres sent his warm wishes for a successful assembly and said, "Around the world, women of all religions have a long history of working for peace in their communities and countries. Too



often, their efforts are marginalized, and they are excluded from formal mediation efforts. Today, faith leaders have a more important role than ever in building peace through interreligious dialogue. But without women's full participation and leadership, that dialogue is incomplete, and peace is less sustainable."

The virtual event continued over four days, with a mixture of expert and lightning talks, interactive breakout sessions which focussed on a range of topics such as; the role of women of faith in peace building, protecting the Earth, discussions on hate speech, combating racism and anti-Semitism, women's leadership in inclusivity and diversity, fighting gender based violence, the importance of values led education and many more. Plenaries and break-out sessions emphasised the need to build multilateral coalitions and collaborations between multiple parties.

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar and Rebecca Bellamy from Religions for Peace UK Women of Faith Network led a workshop on the 'Role of Women of Faith in Protecting the Earth.' On the morning of the final day of the Assembly a multifaith prayer session on 'Hope, Resilience and Peace' was led by the Chair as well as members of the coordinating committee of RfP UK Women of Faith Network. Sikh, Baha'i, Jewish and Hindu prayers were read by Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland, Karen Maxwell, Board of Deputies of British Jews and Dr Lakshmi Vyas, President of the Hindu Forum of Europe respectively.

All recordings from the 1st Assembly on Women, Faith and Diplomacy can be accessed through the following link: <https://wfd2020.ringforpeace.org/videostreams/>

Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Religions for Peace Chair of UK Women of Faith Network

Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees

About every two seconds one person is forced to flee their home; that's 37,000 people every day. More than 80 million people are displaced world-wide.

Glasgow is home to over 4,000 asylum seekers who, unlike resettled refugees, have to make their own way to the UK, have to make a claim to receive refugee status, and are not allowed to work. Syrian refugees have been welcomed through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme across Scotland since 2015 and every single Local Authority has now participated in the welcome.

Faith groups across Scotland, including Interfaith Scotland, have been involved in welcoming refugees through the multi-faith partnership Scottish Faiths Actions for Refugees since its creation in 2015. Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees (SFAR) seeks to promote common values of hospitality and welcome, and coordinates and encourages action by churches and faith communities in Scotland to support asylum seekers and refugees. Building upon this work, the 'New Scots Integration Programme' (2018-2020) was designed with the Scottish Refugee Council to ensure that refugees are effectively integrated into Scottish society and that communities are supported and prepared to welcome refugees and involve them in community life. As part of this programme, faith groups have been learning more about the situations affecting asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland, and at the forefront of extending a hand of friendship, making people feel at home.

New Scots Holidays was one initiative Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees developed and piloted with local faith groups as part of this initiative. Churches from different parts of the

country hosted Syrian families in their homes for a short break offering a space for rest and recreation. New Scots Holidays was designed to support the integration of refugees in Scotland, to help receiving communities to welcome refugees, to create opportunities to build friendships across cultures and faiths and enable refugees to learn more about life in Scotland beyond their home neighbourhood in an enriching experience.

Mrs Sweetin, a minister in Forfar, reflected on hosting a Syrian family who have settled in Aberdeenshire. **"We all arrived home and at 6pm the house was busy with about 15 people from the church who came to say hello and interact with our guests, a wonderful family from Syria who chatted happily about their life in Syria, Lebanon and then Inverurie. On Sunday morning they were keen to attend our church service and both parents spoke and said how grateful they were to my husband and I, and they feel like we are family. It had been one of the best experiences we had ever had."**

The feedback from refugees who have taken part in visits was equally positive. One said "We have never been made to feel so welcome in our lives and been accepted for who we are." Another commented: "Our hosts were amazing - we were crying when we left them." Asked what they liked best about the holiday, a child said: "Being with two people who are like my granny and grandpa." Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees has created a toolkit that shares

these experiences and enables faith groups across Scotland to be part of a similar welcome. We are keen to resource and support local faith groups in offering a radical welcome to refugee communities in Scotland. In January 2021, Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees welcomed a new Co-ordinator who would love to meet you and support your local group! For more information please look on our website (www.sfar.org.uk), or contact Sabine Chalmers schalmers@churchofscotland.org.uk.

Our desire is that faith groups can set an example in what it means to welcome people irrespective of where they are from. Help us to create a hospitable Scottish community that says no to hostility and yes to welcoming the stranger; a society that embraces differences and celebrates diversity; a community that extends a hand of friendship to unfamiliar faces; and a people of faith who serve their new neighbours in love.

Resources to find out more:

Sanctuary in Scotland is an information booklet of refugees for faith groups which includes facts and figures, definitions, current issues and ideas for practical action by faith communities in Scotland.

'God with us' is a new Christian worship resource on the theme of refugees, migration and sanctuary. We have worked ecumenically to create it and hope it will be used by people from many different Christian traditions. It includes bible studies, prayers, liturgies, stories, poems and discussion ideas.

Sikh Sanjog Burns Lunch

On Monday 25 January 2021, Sikh Sanjog held a virtual Burns lunch, inviting its service users and partner organisations' service users to prepare and share their haggis inspired dishes!

Director Trishna Singh gave a wonderful "toast to the haggis" and Community & Youth Manager Sabrina Tickle recited the beautiful poem 'Red Red Rose'. Service users then shared their experiences of haggis, from tasting it for the first time, using it as an ingredient and even learning about it! The event was well received by all and everyone found it an enjoyable way of learning about a national Scottish holiday. Some dishes which were created were Indian spiced flavoured haggis dinner, haggis samosas and parsnip pakora - yum!



Connections – Spirituality

Spiritual is defined in the dictionary as “pertaining to spirit, not material, mental, intellectual, divine”.

It has been summed up by the 17th Century French Philosopher, Blaise Pascal who said, **“When I survey the whole universe and man left to himself with no light, as though lost in the corner of the universe, without knowing who put him there, what he has to do, what will become of him when he dies, incapable of knowing anything... I marvel that so wretched a state does not drive people to despair”.** People thought there must be someone directing all this and looked and thought about it in an effort to try and understand.

I admire and really enjoy the programmes on TV by Professor Brian Cox. He explains everything so well and gives so much information on his concept that everything had been created by chance in accordance with the laws of physics. But to my mind there are still so many unanswered questions in his explanations. Why did the big bang happen? How was life

created in a primordial mix of various elements, how did it all develop into the many creatures we have today, some fast disappearing? Evolution is part of the answer but to me it seems there must be something directing this, it can't just be accidental.

I have been so excited to have a chance to study and learn so much about other faiths that believe in a divine creator and have answered the philosopher's question for why they have hope. All have different ways of looking at the situation but nevertheless offer similar solutions and explanations.

Death, of course, is the great unknown. Are we really a spirit going through a mortal experience or is it all wishful thinking? Are we here because of the laws of physics and biology which meant we were born, live a life here, die and ? That all the knowledge we have learnt, all the experiences

we undergo are just there because of circumstances and nothing to do with a learning process for our further progression.

My eldest brother Jimmy, always declared himself an atheist, that there was no life after death and we only live on through our children and memories of our family and friends. He was a very good older brother if a little dogmatic at times. Once we were having a discussion and I said to him **“Well Jimmy if I am right and there is a life after death I can come to you and say, “See I was right”. But if you are right then you can't tell me so I won't have to apologise to you!”** Only time will tell who is going to be right, we will either be surprised or not know anything more. However we are all entitled to our own point of view and make our own Connections.

Frank Bowness, Fife Interfaith Group



Connecting for Celebration

We live in a dynamic, diversified and global society. The world is moving towards its destiny and the interdependence of the peoples and nations of the world is no more imagination but a fact.

To create the desired global society, it is important to accept others like members of our own family. What is in a family that keeps them united and caring for each other? It is the love and care and the sacrifice of the members for each other that keeps this family able to live together. The same thing is true for the entire world. The same universal love is needed for accepting others. In order that this love may manifest its power, there must be an action. The unselfish love for humanity, the one perfect love, possible for all mankind can only be achieved by the power of the Divine Spirit. No worldly power can accomplish this universal love. The process of this universal love needs to start from our own families and our neighbourhood; to be of some help to others in whatever way possible, especially during this period of COVID-19 pandemic. At this difficult time, Bahá'ís in Glasgow and the neighbouring communities are working along with members of other faiths to

be of some help to whomever they can reach.

In our own lifetime, we have witnessed different kinds of religious activities that bring members of different faiths together. The most effective one is associated with the interfaith activities occurring either in our own neighbourhood, in our city, in our country or in other parts of the world. Bahá'u'lláh, the prophet and founder of the Bahá'í Faith, addressed his followers to associate with members of all faiths in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship. Therefore, associating with the members of all faiths and non-faiths is a moral and religious obligation for Bahá'ís. Interfaith activities are an effective way that helps clarify some of the misconceptions, misunderstandings and misrepresentations among believers and eliminate them through respectful and peaceful dialogue.

All the Holy Scriptures state that we must love one another. Therefore, if we accept that we are created noble, kind, and in the image of God, then associating with each other in the utmost love and harmony and friendship becomes a norm. Bahá'u'lláh states, **"O well-beloved ones! The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch."**

During the COVID-19 pandemic most Bahá'í activities were through Zoom channels. The Connecting in Celebration event was held via Zoom during Scottish Interfaith Week and we were thrilled to celebrate the rich diversity of our human family with all those who joined us.

**Hooshmand Badee, Baha'i
Community of Newtonmearns**



Interfaith Scotland

**Making a Difference
through Dialogue**

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