

IFW NEWS

Interfaith Wolverhampton



Interfaith Prayers for Peace – Love your Neighbour – Sunday 16th October 2016

Interfaith Wolverhampton's vision

is to promote mutual respect and shared commitment to the common good by the City's diverse communities.

We aim to dispel hatred and misunderstanding through dialogue and friendship.

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In This Issue

Death is a destination we all share, a natural phenomenon embedded in our DNA, and in this issue of the Interfaith Wolverhampton newsletter we are focusing on it. But we are focusing on it in a positive way: how we can make the process of dying less painful. It should be the natural epilogue to a life well lived and how the immediate family of the dying and their faith community have a key role to play during the final days and hours before the 'breath becomes air.' There is nothing macabre or depressing about this process if the dying are surrounded by those who care for them and for their physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

We have a number of articles from the perspective of different faiths describing the practical steps taken to facilitate a good end. At the Hour of Dying is a touching account of Jonathan Riley-

Smith who shared his spiritually consoling reflections immediately prior to his death. The narratives by Dr Satya Sharma, Bhajan Devsi, Keith Munnings and Khalid Akhtar give a

diversity of practical considerations that could be taken on board to have the final moments filled with peace.

Interfaith Wolverhampton has been going on over 4 decades now and has made its contribution to the current milieu of community cohesion and peaceful co-existence of diverse faiths in the city. However, resting on the past laurels is not the way forward. We are aware that there is a huge amount of work yet to be done to achieve true understanding and respect between communities despite occasional setbacks. Bishop Clive has delineated some of the priorities for Interfaith Wolverhampton if we are to make any lasting impact on the fast changing communities in the city. There is enough food for thought there in Bishop Clive's piece which urgently needs further discussion.

Ken Collin's account of the Prayers for Peace event illustrates how different faiths promote love-thy-neighbour ethos. The review of Ray Gaston's book 'A Heart Broken Open' by Erik Pearse will, I hope, stimulate further thinking when we are trying to really understand a faith other than our own.



Sehdev Bismal MBE
Editor

Priorities for Interfaith Wolverhampton

It remains a great privilege to serve as President of Interfaith Wolverhampton. I am always struck by a feeling of profound thankfulness that Wolverhampton has an interfaith organisation capable of playing such a constructive and significant part in the life of our City.

That feeling is informed of course by an awareness of the many aspects of IFW's contribution to the building of good Interfaith relations across the City, the visits to different places of worship, the speaker-led Tuesday lunches, the excellent Newsletter, the dedicated work in our schools, the cultural and social events and so on.....

This is an organisation which, due to limited resources, continually manages to make bricks without straw, and which continues to enjoy great respect within the corridors of power in our City, not least because of its ability to be an advocate for peace and justice within Wolverhampton and beyond.

In turning to IFW's future priorities, I will begin by flagging up an issue which reflects IFW's greatest strength, but perhaps also its most obvious weakness.

The continuing vitality and strength of IFW owes a huge amount to the unstinting efforts and commitment of a small group of people. In most cases these people have been in the 'engine room'

of the organisation for many years, working tirelessly to keep IFW relevant and active and engaged in the City.

Due to their passion and dedication, this core group will not suddenly disappear but there is a pressing need for the next generation of Interfaith advocates and leaders to emerge.





Space will need to be created for them, for their vision and input may take us (should take us?) in new directions. If IFW is to remain vigorous and relevant to the challenges of the present time, those of us who have been around for a while must be ready to welcome, encourage and empower potential interfaith activists of the future.

“How can we grow younger?” is a question that many churches, as well as no doubt other faith communities, ask themselves.

One possibility that may be worth exploring is IFW establishing an Internship opportunity for a young person. A project that could be linked with such an Internship might be the creation of a much more effective Online and Social Media presence for the organisation.

I have been struck by the success of the Near Neighbours initiative ‘Catalyst’, a course that has helped to enable the development of young faith leaders. I was impressed too by the prominence of young faith leaders at the recent ‘Love Your Neighbour’ event in Wolverhampton. It is not that young people are not interested in interfaith dialogue and initiatives; it is perhaps that we as an organisation need to find more effective ways of connecting with them. And if we are serious about that, we must accept that IFW will need to adapt and change to reflect the next generations’ priorities and ways of doing things.

IFW is not going to ‘grow younger’ overnight but in the meantime it needs to continue to demonstrate its ability to respond to new challenges and opportunities in our fast changing landscape.

The most obvious challenge is the rise of hate crimes post Brexit and the culture of suspicion and unease that lies beneath the recorded

incidents. This constitutes a grave threat to the fabric of our multi-cultural, multi-faith society and, as the Brexit campaign illustrated so clearly, there will always be politicians and media commentators who will seek to capitalise on people’s legitimate concerns and fears, for their own ends, stirring up racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in the process. Nigel Farage’s notorious ‘ Breaking Point’ poster being a perfect example.



In this climate we cannot for a moment be complacent in Wolverhampton, just as the founders of IFW were not complacent in the face of Enoch Powell’s poisonous rhetoric.

We must above all make sure that we are not simply talking amongst like-minded people and ourselves. We must find ways of extending our reach and our impact, consistent with our resources and capabilities.

In addition to prioritising Growing Younger I would suggest four other areas for prioritisation.



**Wolverhampton
City of Sanctuary**

1. Strengthen or create partnerships with groups and organisations which have similar or overlapping interests. Working together as closely as possible, sharing platforms, looking at joint initiatives

It’s not that we don’t do this already, but perhaps there is scope for taking this approach further, e.g. IFW could perhaps partner with City of Sanctuary and/or the Refugee and Migrant Centre to put on a

conference relating to issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers.

Or with the University Chaplaincy and/or the YMCA to give a forum for young people to share experiences of living out their faith in Wolverhampton today.

Perhaps we might look at the opportunity to engage with A-level Religious Studies students in some of the City's Sixth Forms?

2. The Black Country Near Neighbours funding programme has contributed very positively to encouraging and supporting local inter-faith initiatives, from sports clubs, to street parties, to environmental and cultural projects. In many places it has unearthed or helped to generate energy for interfaith working in local neighbourhoods.

Near Neighbours has a hand-to-mouth existence. It will not be with us forever. While it is, it can help us to see some new possibilities for supporting interfaith work at neighbourhood level in Wolverhampton.

Better connectivity with grassroots activity can only help us be more informed and more effective in our wider role of advocacy for inter-faith issues.

3. The challenge of engaging faith leaders with the work and concerns of IFW is not a new one. I know from personal experience how significant the obstacles are to achieving this. Who are the key leaders? Who do they speak for and who are they accountable to? How great is their authority? And even if all these questions can be answered, how on earth do you manage to get them together in one room at the same time?



But it is a challenge that we have to keep on prioritising if we are to continue to have credibility as an Interfaith organisation in the City. And perhaps we have to be a bit more supple in our thinking about how to engage faith leaders. Perhaps it is not so much about trying to get certain individuals to meetings, as putting our energy into maintaining as wide a network of contacts among faith leaders as we can & trying to discern what are the key issues for them and for their communities – and trying to build interest and engagement from there.



4. The final challenge relates to Inter Faith in the Public Square. In recent years there has been a greater interest from political parties and both local and national government in engaging faith traditions in their own political agendas. Only last week a leaflet was being handed out at the UKIP conference which declared that being pro-EU was a betrayal of Christian beliefs. The leaflet was distributed on behalf of a fringe group called UKIP Christian soldiers. This hijacking of a particular faith tradition by militant extremists is not of course particular to Christianity. IFW has shown itself ready to speak out against such extremism, as when we demonstrated so powerfully in solidarity with the victims of hate killings in Syria and elsewhere. Such public demonstrations of unity in defence of fundamental human rights and values must continue to be an urgent priority for us. We must also have the courage to stand up for such values if we judge that it is government itself, whether locally or nationally, which is threatening them. This may take us into more contentious areas such as the Prevent agenda, or the impact of welfare cuts or the refugee crisis. Here we may not find it so easy to agree among ourselves but that should not mean that we duck the issues in favour of

remaining in our comfort zone. Who knows, we might win some new friends and supporters if we are willing to, please excuse the Christian reference, go where angels fear to tread!



The Citizens movement, established in a number of our Cities & often including a significant multi-faith involvement, provides a model for how community organising can challenge unjust or discriminatory policies. Citizens UK has also been quite successful in drawing in denominations (such as Pentecostal churches) not often involved in Inter Faith structures.

In conclusion, I would suggest that the new Board undertake a brief review of IFW's present priorities and activities, and consider either these or perhaps entirely different suggestions for extending our reach and our impact & growing our membership younger.

Which is not to say that age and experience will not continue to be valued as they always have.

Where would we be without them?



+ **Clive Gregory** (President of Interfaith Wolverhampton)

[Originally a talk given by Bishop Clive at the Interfaith AGM]

At the Hour of our Death

Before he died on 13 September after a long illness, Jonathan Riley-Smith, a distinguished historian, wrote this advice to others who are dying.

Death is not only unavoidable but necessary; and how we die is, at least in part, determined by our choices. If, like me, you are faced by terminal illness, be thankful that you have not died suddenly. You may have been one of those who, in the belief that they would be spared suffering, wanted to pass away quickly and without warning. If so, you have been ignoring the effect that such an event would have had on your family, the chaos you would certainly have left behind and the burdensome and expensive work of tidying up that would have been imposed on others. You have been privileged and it is important that you should make use of this grace to set your affairs in order.

If you are, like me, a Christian, you have been given the opportunity to prepare yourself to meet

your creator. Catholics have always prayed to be spared "a sudden and unprovided death". Bear in



mind that God has some purpose for you. Take full advantage of the sacraments. Establish a pattern of regular prayer, but do not give way to over-enthusiasm. It is better to begin modestly and to build further if you find it desirable.

Be glad, too, that the warning you have had will allow you to come to terms with your condition. You must try to be at peace. A good death can provide comfort to your family, but it needs a contribution from yourself as well as the assistance of medicine. This is hard advice. It is easier for old men like me to follow it than for the young, who are bound to feel unfairly treated by providence. Nevertheless, you must be reconciled to your end as far as is possible. Avoid anger or regrets. Do not despair. Enjoy the life left to you and be grateful for it.

This will prove to be easier than you expected. You will have found already that, in the moments after you heard the doctors' report, any idea of a future was driven from your mind. No other option was left to you than to live day by day. I was astonished to find how quickly I came to terms with this. I should have lived every moment as though it was my last throughout my life, but I had pursued my career on the assumption that I would survive almost for ever. Now, with the evaporation of the future, the present moment became so precious that I wondered why I had let it fly by. My senses were intensified. My curiosity was sharpened. The beauty of natural objects and the vividness of my surroundings were enhanced. You will discover yourself embracing this vision, which is the one we had as children, lost with age and have now recovered. It is exhilarating and rewarding.

The annihilation of your future should not prevent you from setting yourself some short-term goals. These can be related to your work, to your interests, or to the issues that you do not want to leave unresolved on death. Write your memoirs. Take up painting. You must remain active and involved as long as you can.



Do not let the acceptance of death become a surrender to it. We all dread the prospect of pain. Modern medicine cannot entirely relieve us of it, although my experience is that it can be made bearable and that, as so often in life, expectations are worse than reality. Of course there are cases where death is agonising or where a neurological disorder gradually deprives a victim of all senses or where an active man or woman finds the prospect of dependence on others unbearable. One hears regularly of those for whom life has become so atrocious that they want a legitimate means to end it. Their despair and the compassionate support of their carers are understandable and moving, but life is a precious gift from God and as Christians we believe that we have no right to dispose of it as we please. And whether or not we are attached to a religion, it is counter-productive for most of us to believe that we should be able to end our lives at will. There are dangers in manufacturing its closure, however attractive this may seem to be.

A feature of the condition in which we find ourselves is that we are often subjected by well-meaning relations and friends to bizarre advice and quack remedies. Do not allow yourself to be tempted by nostrums that never work and make our reconciliation to our illness harder by presenting us with apparently easy solutions. It is cruel to offer forlorn hope in this way. It is best for us to follow the advice of doctors, whose treatments are at least based on science.

We are all drawn to the extraordinary at the expense of the mundane, because, although some of us abandon faith altogether, many of us at least half believe that there is more to life than material existence and in crises turn beyond ourselves. In the initial stages of my disease it was not my religion that comforted me; it was the recognition of my condition that heightened my attachment to my religion. In other words, that yearning for something beyond myself found expression in the strengthening of my faith. In the end, of course, faith and illness become so intertwined that each becomes part of the other.

Remember that all your life has been a preparation for an event which is as significant as your birth and is far more important than any birthday. You are about to pass on to another plane and into

another world. There may still be time to draw some comfort from memories of your earthly past, provided that you do not become consumed by unnecessary guilt. What happened long ago is over and done with, although it is good to make peace with anyone you have offended.

Treat your death as a celebration. Take an interest in it. Plan your funeral as carefully as you would the wedding of one of your children. Take care to leave your closest relations with good memories of your ending. Your fortitude will ensure that they will remember you with pride and affection,

and that they will pray for you. Remember that death is no barrier to prayer.

Jonathan Riley-Smith

Jonathan was a historian of the Crusades, and a Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History. He was also a Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. The article was first published in The Tablet: The International Catholic News Weekly. Reproduced with permission of the Publisher <http://www.thetablet.co.uk>

Dying Well and Palliative Care

ਜੰਮਣੁ ਮਰਣਾ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਹੈ ਭਾਣੈ ਆਵੈ ਜਾਇ ॥ Guru Nanak Dev Ji

Birth and death are subject to the Command of the Lord's Will; through His Will we come and go. (Guru Nanak Dev Ji)

Therefore suicide and euthanasia are not acceptable to Sikhs.

ਸਲੋਕ ਮਃ ੯ - ਜੋ ਉਪਜਿਓ ਸੋ ਬਿਨਸਿ ਹੈ ਪਰੋ ਆਜੁ ਕੈ ਕਾਲਿ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਹਰਿ ਗੁਨ ਗਾਇ ਲੇ ਛਾਇ ਸਗਲ
ਜੰਜਾਲ॥੫੨॥

Whatever has been created shall be destroyed, everyone shall perish, today or tomorrow. O Nanak, sing the Glorious Praises of the Lord, and give up all other entanglements. (9th Guru Teg Bahadur Ji).

Death is a great mystery but a reality, it comes to all whether young or old, rich or poor, anyone who is born has to die by the law of the nature. Sikhs believe that all living beings have an eternal soul which passes through successive cycles of birth and rebirth.

Human being is combination of body, mind and soul. The body is alive if soul is there. If soul is there, the mind, intellect and breath are there. If the soul is gone, the body is dead. Death can destroy the body but not the soul. Birth and death are painful experiences - we cry when we are born and when we die. Only some souls are exempted and they pass away without pain and suffering.

"When the body is filled with ego and selfishness, the cycle of birth and death does not end" (Guru Granth Sahib Ji, 126). "As long as the tongue does not chant the Name of God, the person continues

coming and going in reincarnation, crying out in pain" (Guru Granth Sahib Ji, 325).

Sikhs believe in the transmigration of the soul and the human form is the last incarnation before it experiences liberation from the cycle of life, death and rebirth. Two things can happen after death. First, if this soul had meditated enough on God and with good *karma* had purified itself by getting rid of lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego, it should merge back with God and its cycle of life and death is finished for ever. Second, if this soul had not worshiped God enough and realised Him but was on the right path it will be

given more chances to barter the accumulation of its *karma* and the love of God for a new body out of 8,400,000 life forms that exist on this planet alone. It may be as an insect, animal or in human form to become closer to God.



A Sikh desires a death without being a burden on others and with dignity intact thus he / she will pray regularly and do good karma aiming to get out of this cycle of

birth and death and merge with the creator.

People usually avoid the issue of death and do not want to talk about it. Sometimes they link death to old age thus try to hide it by a face-lift or dyeing their grey hair to jet black. Everyone asks for long life and no one wishes to die.

Unfortunately, individuals diagnosed with terminal medical conditions become dependent on others and are helpless. The individual may wish to die at home amongst his / her family who can meet all his requirements. It is for this reason that Compton Hospice has been providing 'Hospice at Home' to Asians for many years in Wolverhampton. Unfortunately, because of changes in circumstances like the geographical distance between the dying and their loved ones due to employment dislocation, the extended family may not be able to provide this support.

It is very important therefore that they are given appropriate, linguistic and culturally sensitive palliative care in hospice or hospital. Sikhism places the responsibility of practising religion on the individual. As a result, it is important that health care providers discuss end of life issues in advance, care planning about religious observance needs, with each patient. They need to discuss with their patient the topics including five articles of faith that are required to wear at all times (should not be removed without permission); removal of hair; ablution, bathing and cleanliness; dietary needs; and prayer. A Sikh's turban is

considered part of the articles of faith and should not be asked to remove it in public.

Many Sikhs are strict vegetarians, abstaining from all meat, fish and eggs, but do consume dairy products. Non-vegetarian Sikhs may choose not to eat beef or pork and are also not permitted to eat any meat that has been ritually slaughtered thus avoid halal or kosher meals. A Sikh patient's family may wish to provide alternative meals prepared at home.

Prayer is an important part of the daily routine of most Sikhs to seek God's help in recovering from illness, to obtain peace and ask for forgiveness. Sikh patients may wish to recite or listen to *Gurbani / kirtan* (sacred hymns / music) which are God's word enshrined in the *Guru Granth Sahib* to be played at the bedside as it is considered an important element of treating illnesses of the body and mind. Prayer can take place in any location, including in bed. Sikh patients may wish to have a prayer book with them which is usually covered with a piece of cloth and should be kept in a clean place above the height of the bed.

The sanctity of life is considered paramount and family and friends may wish to be present to recite prayers or read scriptures when nearing death. Holy Water from the *Gurdwara* (Sikh temple) may be given to the patient to sip. Sikh chaplaincy services are now available in many hospitals to provide a final prayer for the departing soul.



Bhajan Devsi

Dying Well: A Hindu Perspective

Hinduism has a stratified social and ethical system based on Karma (deeds) and Dharma (code of conduct or righteousness). Common beliefs in Hinduism include samsara (rebirth and reincarnation), moksha (liberation from the cycle of births and deaths) and dharma (what is and should be).

Hinduism does not have a specific or blanket institutional framework nor does it demand adherence to a particular set of doctrines. There is a wide variety of traditions and customs in regard to the significant milestones and events in one's life including death. Some of the traditions and rituals, therefore, vary from region to region. Some families follow their own variations as practised by generations within the clan.

Although death is often a taboo subject in contemporary society, Hindus are actively encouraged to face it willingly as physical cessation is believed to be merely a transition to another life. In the



Bhagvad Gita, this transition is deemed to be analogous to changing the garments, casting aside the old clothes and putting on new ones. Physical death does not signal the end of soul which goes through a cycle of births and deaths based on one's karma accumulated in current life. The inevitability of death as an integral part of the cycle of births and deaths does not allow the concept of voluntary euthanasia or suicide. Life is precious, a gift from Brahma, the Supreme Creator of this universe and interfering with this ultimate truth is a sin all Hindus must avoid. Moksha is the ultimate objective of life for Hindus. They believe in eternal soul which is reborn until it becomes pure enough to be emancipated from this cycle. And purity is gained through accumulation of good karma and living a life in tune with one's dharma.

Current health policies in place in this country are intended to reduce health inequalities through the provision of accessible and appropriate services and by tackling racial discrimination through diversity management. It is therefore essential for palliative care to ensure that service provision is truly patient-centred.

There are certain rituals and practices associated with the dying which need to be taken on board by all those who are responsible for providing care prior to the termination of life.

Relatives are expected to help the dying to achieve a good death and, in consequence, there may sometimes be tension between disclosure, autonomy and the right of relatives.

The dying Hindu may wish to have a small statue or picture of the family god to be placed at the bedside. Hindus consider the Ganges a holy river and its water sacred. They may wish to place a few drops of this sacred water into the mouth of the dying patient. A small oil lamp and burning incense may also be desirable to the dying on their next journey. Prayers are usually offered at this juncture. Many Hindus believe reading of holy books such as Gita Ramayana or Garud Puran would help achieve Moksha. Relatives and family friends need the freedom to bring in home-made food for the patient to avoid eating meat, particularly beef.

After death, it is important that a death certificate is issued promptly together with appropriate paperwork to ensure cremation. People of the same sex should handle the body after death.

Traditionally Asians look after the dying but attitudes and options available to them impact on their ability to do so due to employment opportunities away from home. After cremation, ashes are immersed in the water, preferably in the Ganges or a river or in the sea in this country. Funerals are usually well attended because all those close to the family come for the last Darshan, viewing, of the body. After funeral, family and community support is generously given to the bereaved to enable them come to terms with their loss.



Dr Satya Sharma

What are the Signs of a Good End?

A good end only comes to those who are inwardly and outwardly upon the straight path, and an evil end comes to those who are corrupt and sinful, remaining so until they die without repenting. There are signs of a good end, some of which are seen by the dying person as he is dying, and some which may be visible to other people.

A good end means when a person was guided before his death to keep away from that which angers the Lord and to repent from sin, and to focus on doing acts of worship and good deeds,



and then he died in this good state. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: “When God wills good for His slave, He uses him.” They said, “How does He use him?” He said: “He guides him to do good

deeds before he dies.” [Ahmad]

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) also said: “When God wills good for His slave, He sweetens him.” He was asked, “What is this sweetening?” He said: “God guides him to do righteous deeds before he dies, then He takes (his soul) whilst he is in that state.” [Ahmad]

The signs of a good end that appear to the dying person are the things that give him glad tidings as he is dying, that God The Almighty is pleased with him.



Khalid Akhtar

Dying Well: A Buddhist Perspective

As an ‘ice-breaker’ before exploring this topic, here are three questions through which to examine personal experience while reflecting upon your own death:

- What will people remember most about you?
- How would you like to be remembered?
- What regrets will you have about your life?

Buddhist concept of death

The Buddha encouraged practitioners to meditate on death regularly. This does not seem easy to do, not to mention sounding somewhat morbid! Experience shows how the regular practice reminds us to lead a more meaningful life, not to waste away our days. Buddha taught us to regularly arouse *samvega*, a Pali word meaning a sense of urgency to strive hard.

Powerful statements about dying are cited by many teachers within Buddhist literature, a few are:

- ‘Dying well, living well?’
- ‘Dying with a smile on your face? Everyone around me need not cry, they can be happy because there is a smile on my face’.

Central in Buddhist teaching are the cycles of birth, death and rebirth. The notion of death-rebirth supports the sense of a process of dying, both for the bereaved and for their family / friends. Different traditions



within Buddhism suggest different periods of time for the dying process to complete: Tibetan teachings are that the dying process in entirety takes 49 days.

The Seven factors of a peaceful death (Watts and Tomatsu, 2012).

An example of how the principles put forth by the Buddha can be adapted for those in healthcare.

- 1) Extending loving-kindness, compassion, joy in the joy of others and equanimity (the 'four divine abidings')
- 2) Helping patients accept impending death
- 3) Helping patients focus their minds on goodness
- 4) Helping patients settle unfinished business
- 5) Helping patients let go of everything
- 6) Creating a peaceful atmosphere
- 7) Saying goodbye



Case Studies – Patients A, B and C

- A) The chaplain is called to a patient and the family are informed that their mother, who was fully engaged in home life a few hours earlier, is 'brain dead'. The family comprises those of a variety of faiths and none, but all agree they want a miracle to occur. At this point a religious intervention, Buddhist chanting in the style known to the patient, is offered. All family members are asked to recollect their mother's good deeds and a number of interventions are subsequently provided by different chaplains.
- B) An elderly dying gentleman has his three sons with him at the bedside - the two eldest sons are uncomfortable being there, the youngest son seeks the chaplain's ministry. After Buddhist chanting is offered to the patient, the youngest son asks for an additional blessing for the family. He is then able to comfort his father that the family are and will be OK. A few hours later the father dies peacefully.
- C) A terminal patient, who led a colourful life, requests a Buddhist Chaplain and each time they meet sits up energetically talking about his plans to return to his beloved Thailand. His nurse sees this simply as denial. The chaplain talks about this to a close friend of the patient who later says to the patient 'you know what's happening, C?'. C replies 'Yes, I do'.

Reflections

Each case study details a patient's journey until the time comes to say goodbye (factor 7).

The four divine abidings provide a description of the emotional context of pastoral, spiritual and religious care maybe for the care giver and the patient (factor 1). The outcomes in each case study are consequent upon these qualities in action.

In case study A, chanting for the patient after the doctor's pronouncement, illustrates the value of focussing upon the patient's goodness (factor 3).

In case study B, the father is given permission to die well in the knowledge his children will be safe (factor 2), the chanting having created a powerful atmosphere (factor 6).

Case study C includes some unfinished business being addressed (factor 4) and someone is able to help the patient let go (factor 5).

Keith Munnings

"A Heart Broken Open" by Ray Gaston. A Book Review by Erik Pearse.

This profoundly challenging book is, in the words of Firdaws Khan, 'a voyage into the heart of Islam, not just as an intellectual exercise but as a living experience.' This dual approach – to seek not only to understand but also to share through active involvement – is reflected in the titles of the two parts of Ray's book. *Solidarity* describes Ray's involvement as a Parish Priest in inner-city Leeds, in partnership with local community activists including Muslims, to protest actively, to the point of being arrested, against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, leading to a highly dangerous trip to Karbala to accompany a Shi'a Muslim friend to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. In *Truth*, Ray reflects on his Christian beliefs in the light of the Qur'an, an experience deepened by his annual participation in Ramadan, powerfully illustrated in his journal entries for one of those years.

The extent and depth of the author's radical commitment to discipleship of Jesus Christ – defined as 'practical and loving witness to the truth of Christ, resistance and repudiation of empire and openness to the truth of the other' – provide a real challenge to Christians in particular, both in the way they deepen and express their faith and the way they live it. Through living alongside Muslims, participating in Muslim worship and studying the Qur'an, notably during the period of Ramadan, Ray shares how his own faith has been challenged and deepened and how much Islam can teach us if only we will listen. I had not realised that *islam*, besides meaning *peace*, also signifies *submission and obedience*. This humility before God and the mystery of God is hard for many, brought up to believe – indeed to idolise – science, to accept. Earthquakes and other natural disasters – which can cause us Christians so much angst about how they can be compatible with a loving God – do not appear to be a problem for Muslims – they are, quite simply, part of God's inscrutable will, to be accepted in the spirit of *islam*.

In one of his reflections on the Qur'an in his Ramadan journal, Ray Gaston quotes from a passage in the Qur'an that relates directly to Christ and Christianity:

*Further, that he may warn
Those who say,
'Allah hath begotten a son'.*

*No knowledge have they
Of such a thing, nor
Had their fathers. It is
A grievous thing that issues
From their mouths as a saying.*

*What they say is nothing
But falsehood!*

'Is this' the author muses, 'another opportunity for us to look at how we have presented Christ's saving work?....Is this another prophetic challenge to articulate the true depth of meaning and power in the relational dynamic at the heart of the doctrine of the Trinity and enter into serious dialogue with Islam on the nature of God?'

Challenging words which, along with the book's inspiration to become living exemplars of the Gospel's message in the way we conduct our lives, will surely give us Christians much food for thought and action.



*Treasures of the Ivy
Gutridge Collection
(located in the Faith section in the Central
Library)*

Erik Pearse

Love Your Neighbour

Such a simple injunction and yet such a profound statement, which was the theme for this year's Prayer for Peace which took place again at St Peter's Collegiate Church during the afternoon of Sunday 16th October.



The word Love struggles with the popular presentation which descends into sentimentality, whereas in faith terms requires a great deal of commitment and dedication to help us reach out to those whom we may not like or who are very different from ourselves, our way of life or indeed what we personally would deem as acceptable. Then when you add the question as to who would be considered as your neighbour in a present day global setting, and the profundity of the injunction becomes clearer.

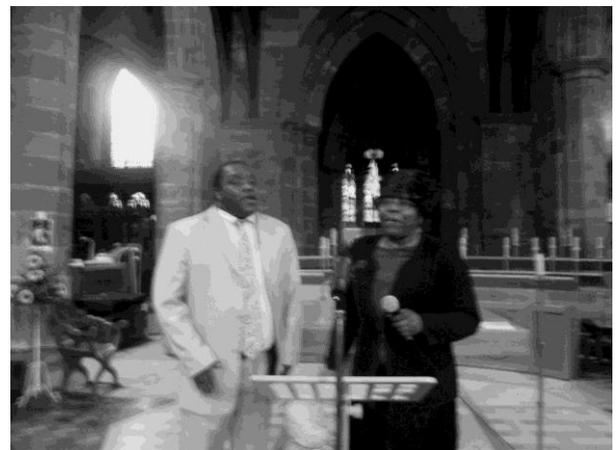


In order to help us begin to explore the theme in this act of worship, speaker representatives of several Faith Traditions were invited to express what the theme meant in the context of their particular faith. After Rev. David Wright gave a very warm welcome to St Peter's, Mrs Parveen Brigue, the Chair of InterFaith Wolverhampton, lit the Peace Candle and underlined that IFW seeks to give expression through praying for peace to the theme for the occasion. Then following on from each other, the representatives of their faith traditions led our thinking on the theme. Mr. Sehdev Bismal spoke on the Hindu perception, followed by Dr. Yusuf Shafi on the Muslim perception, who was then followed in turn by Pastor Janette Watson on Christian perception, Mrs Kamaljit Kaur for Sikhism, and Ven. Tejwant Banti from the Buddhist tradition.

What became clear was that the call to love ones neighbour was very much part of the expression of faith within the different traditions. True, that approaches may differ and expressions vary, but the concern to reach out to others was a fundamental and integral part of the Faiths represented. The very form

that the service takes equally gives expression to the challenge to all of us to love your neighbour.

After the lighting of the Peace Candle, the contributions from each of the speakers were interspersed with lively singing of Gospel songs by the Bethel West Midlands Group which drew members of the congregation into active participation. Mike Shelley-Smith read from the Christian scriptures, 1 Corinthians chapter 13, expressing St Paul's writing about love. Then Mrs Parveen Brigue led the lighting of the candles from the Peace Candle followed by the Mayor, Councillor Barry Findlay, expressing his thanks to IFW for its contribution to the life of the city and to all of us who attended, as in doing so we were sharing in being neighbours. The gracious attendance of the Mayor and Mayoress also demonstrated the support of the City for the Prayers for Peace and the ongoing work of IFW.



The Prayer of Rededication was led by Rev Ray Gaston and the final blessing was given by Rev David Wright after which people mixed informally to share in the light refreshments provided by Hansa Patel's Sathya Sai Service Organisation.

Ken Collins.

Diary of Events

November

- 9th (Wednesday) **"The Joy of Creation - On Care for our Common Home"** The second of five Evening Meals with invited speakers, on each Wednesday evening in November. Tonight, Imam Ali Akbar with a Muslim perspective. 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at the Newman Centre, Haywood Drive, Tettenhall, Wolverhampton, WV6 8RF. Further Details / Booking Form from our website or the office.
- 13th (Sunday) - 20th **National Inter Faith Week** <http://www.interfaithweek.org/>.
- 15th (Tuesday) **Bring and Share Lunch** 12.45 - 2.00, "Darlington Street Methodist Centre", 24 School Street, WV1 4LF. Speaker: Board member Jas Dehar.
- 16th (Wednesday) **"The Joy of Creation - On Care for our Common Home"** The third of five Evening Meals with invited speakers. Tonight, Ram Aithal with a Hindu perspective. 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at the Newman Centre, Haywood Drive, Tettenhall, Wolverhampton, WV6 8RF. Further Details / Booking Form from our website or the office.
- 19th (Saturday) **"Dying Well"** Interfaith Wolverhampton Conference, with Keynote Speaker Baroness Ilora Finlay (see right). Also Keith Munnings (Buddhist), Rev. Elaine Anderton (Christian), Dr Satya Sharma (Hindu), Imam Rashid Raja (Muslim), Dr Mandeep Uppal (Sikh), and Prof. Magi Sque (Swan Bereavement Care). 10 am to 1:15 pm, followed by lunch. Registration from 9:30 am. Chancellor's Hall, The Wulfruna Building, University of Wolverhampton, Wulfruna Street, WV1 1SE. Poster available at http://www.ifwton.org.uk/InterfaithConference191116_PostersMk3.pdf . Further details available by emailing FEHWevents@wlv.ac.uk . Advance booking available at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/dying-well-tickets-27828920049> .
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- 23rd (Wednesday) **"The Joy of Creation - On Care for our Common Home"** The fourth of five Evening Meals with invited speakers. Tonight, Rabbi Margaret Jacoby with a Jewish perspective. 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at the Newman Centre, Haywood Drive, Tettenhall, Wolverhampton, WV6 8RF.
- 30th (Wednesday) **"The Joy of Creation - On Care for our Common Home"** The last of five Evening Meals with invited speakers. Tonight, Bhajan Devsi with a Sikh perspective. 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at the Newman Centre, Haywood Drive, Tettenhall, Wolverhampton, WV6 8RF.

December 2016

- 20th (Tuesday) **NO** Bring and Share Lunch this month.

Diary of Events (continued)

January 2017

- 17th (Tuesday) **Bring and Share Lunch** 12.45 - 2.00, "Darlington Street Methodist Centre", 24 School Street, WV1 4LF. Speaker: Rev. Ray Gaston, vicar of the Church of St. Chad and St. Mark in Penn Fields, and author of the book, "A Heart Broken Open".
- 26th (Friday) **Reception for Bishop Michael Ipgrave, new Bishop of Lichfield, and for Revd Rachel Parkinson, new Chair of the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury Methodist District** Late afternoon / early evening. More details to follow.
- 27th (Friday) **Holocaust Memorial Day** 11 a.m. A service led by Interfaith Wolverhampton at the Cenotaph, St. Peter's Square, Wolverhampton City Centre. Followed by a reception and signing of the Statement of Commitment in the Mayoral Suite.

February 2017

- 16th (Thursday) **A Film Show**, hosted in the home of one of our members 6 p.m. More details to follow.
- 21st (Tuesday) **Bring and Share Lunch** 12.45 - 2.00, "Darlington Street Methodist Centre", 24 School Street, WV1 4LF. Speaker: Will Foster; Minister, and Dean of Staffordshire at Wolverhampton University.

For up-to-date details, see the Interfaith Wolverhampton website: <http://ifwton.org.uk/diary.html>

Contact Details

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The office is most likely to be staffed between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. - Best to phone before you visit.

<u>President:</u> Bishop Clive Gregory	<u>Vice President:</u> Sehdev Bismal MBE	<u>Chair:</u> Parveen Brigue	<u>Vice-Chair:</u> Yusuf Shafi
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<u>Secretary/Treasurer:</u> Erik Pearse	<u>Other Officers:</u> Bhajan Devsi, Rev. David Lavender and Dr. Harun Rashid.
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A full list of Board Members is available at <http://www.ifwton.org.uk/BoardMembership2016-17.pdf> or from the office.

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