

IFW NEWS



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

In order to reinforce the urgent need for understanding and tolerance between different faiths, Interfaith Wolverhampton undertakes a wide range of activities. It initiates or supports many projects that highlight the devastating impact on individuals' inalienable right to practise their own beliefs, traditions and faiths if their human rights to freedom from persecution are violated.

Unfortunately, such infringements do occur with malignant regularity. Through our activities we try to remind ourselves, and others, to be vigilant and not to take our freedoms for granted.

The recent visit to the Holocaust Memorial Centre in Nottingham reminds us that complacency can, and often does, prove to be mortally corrosive.

The Nazis used propaganda, persecution, and legislation to deny human and civil rights to Jews. By the end of the Holocaust, six million Jewish men, women and children had perished in ghettos, mass-shootings, in concentration camps and extermination camps. The accounts of the visit to the Holocaust Memorial Centre are powerful reminders of 'man's inhumanity to man'.

In 1995, following General Ratko Mladic' capture of Srebrenica , more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were systematically massacred and buried in mass graves. It was the greatest atrocity on European soil since the Second World War and the world silently witnessed "unimaginable savagery" meted out to victims. Erik Pearse's account of his visit to Srebrenica is a moving read. A brief account of a special service to remember those atrocities is also included in this issue.

There are thought-provoking articles on Climate Change: Reflections on Laudato Si' and the Urgent Question of Climate Change. It is clear that we can no longer sweep this urgent issue under the carpet and instead of adopting an ostrich-like attitude must do something tangible to salvage the planet that we are blessed with.



Mike Shelley Smith's thoughts on his interfaith involvement give an interesting account of the evolutionary stages of our organization. The City of Sanctuary is a timely piece when the mass dislocation of migrants hits the headlines again and again. And I hope you will enjoy John Barnett's review of Muslims Ask, Christians Answer.

Editor
Sehdev Bismal MBE

Editorial Board
Sehdev Bismal
The Reverend David Wright
Erik Pearse

City of Sanctuary

When the City of Sanctuary movement was first mooted by Inderjit Bhogal and Craig Barnett the plan was to make Sheffield a city that would welcome asylum seekers who had been dispersed there. Their hard work obtained the support of local charities, businesses and individuals. They even managed to get the local council to pass a resolution of support. All this took place ten years ago. Their idea was taken up elsewhere and there are now over forty cities of sanctuary throughout UK and Ireland.

Our objectives in Wolverhampton are to build on those foundations and create an organisation to support the seven hundred people who have been dispersed to the city. We are slowly making contact with groups of people who are helping in other ways. We

have plans to hold a weekly drop-in centre where these lonely people can meet together for a cup of tea and a snack and have the opportunity to talk to people and find out that there are others with the same worries as themselves. If people have specific problems we hope to

be able to signpost them to the best source of qualified help.

My involvement also dates from ten years ago. I used to say, "Send them all home", until a young lady arrived to clean my office. When I discovered what a dreadful life she had had and the inhuman way the British Government dealt with such people, my life changed forever. I have visited six cities of sanctuary, to speak about my concerns, and four Immigration Detention Centres to visit detainees.

It was November 2012 that I attended a meeting of Amnesty in Wolverhampton and a lady mentioned that there were plans to create a Wolverhampton City of Sanctuary. It was a complete shock to me because I was looking for a local organisation but had heard nothing about one in Wolverhampton. It took months of searching before I finally made contact and attended my first meeting. By the fourth meeting the organiser had resigned and I volunteered to prepare the minutes for the group.

I am delighted to say that the group of people we now have are working together to create an organisation we can be proud of. We now have a constitution, bank account, a chair, treasurer and secretary. We have received a grant to provide money to cover travel expenses that are imposed on asylum seekers by our government.



In June the group organised a Meet and Mingle event and art exhibition at The Lighthouse that was attended by over 150 people, both asylum seekers and local people.

In June the group organised a Meet and Mingle event and art exhibition at The Lighthouse that was attended by over 150 people, both asylum seekers and local people. The idea was that it gave locals an opportunity to discover what lovely people these strangers are. My life changed when a black lady came to clean my office and it was hoped that one or two people would have the same experience.

Our hope for the future is to get more recognition for our group. The Council Leader and Mayor are aware and I do hope that they will attend one of our meetings. Our government have sent these unfortunate human beings to Wolverhampton. I sincerely hope that residents of Wolverhampton and the Council get to realise the atrocities that they have escaped from and their genuine terror of being returned to their persecutors. During the time that they live in our midst we should all make an effort to make them feel welcome and safe

We are looking for volunteers willing to give three hours each month to help with the Drop-in Centre, and of course we are always looking for money.

John Catley

Remembering Srebrenica?

Twenty years ago last July, in Bosnia, barely two hours flight from Britain, over 8,000 men and boys were massacred by Bosnian Serb forces. We watched the development of this horrendous genocide – the worst in Europe since the Holocaust – on our television screens, but collectively failed to prevent it happening.

t is so easy to forget. When I mention Srebrenica, people generally put on a glazed expression and I need to remind them that it is the location, here in Europe, of a gruesome massacre of innocent men and boys – aged from 94 to as young as 5 – simply because they happened to be born as Muslims in a country where, for centuries, Muslims, Orthodox Christians and Catholics

had lived alongside one another in relative harmony.

As the Roman Catholic representative on an inter-faith delegation from Birmingham, which included Rabbi Margaret Jacobi, who so kindly hosted our visit to Birmingham's Progressive Synagogue last year and Councillor Muhammad Afzal, the Chairman of Birmingham's Central Mosque, I was privileged last

month to visit Sarajevo and Srebrenica at the invitation of Remembering Srebrenica, a British charitable initiative with all-party support to encourage everyone in our society to learn about the consequences of hate and discrimination.

The extent of man's inhumanity to man is hard to digest, particularly when one visits the places where it has taken place so recently. One of the most gruesome of our experiences was to visit what is called the Identification Project. This is where teams of specialists, one of whom is herself from Serbia, seek to identify DNA samples of the bones of those massacred and buried in mass graves. In order to cover their tracks, the Serbian army frequently disinterred and relocated in new mass graves some of the remains of those massacred. In order to reassemble the skeletons of those killed, so that their relatives can give them a proper burial, the specialists often have to bring together remains from a number of different mass graves. Many of those killed at this time have still not been found; others are buried by their families with some body parts still missing; if these are subsequently found, the families then have to decide whether or not to arrange a further burial service, and sometimes a third one, with all the renewed trauma which this entails.

Our collective failure to respond adequately to such dreadful acts of inhumanity was vividly demonstrated by our visit to the UN compound in Srebrenica, established by the UN to provide a safe haven for Muslims seeking to escape the systematic killing of their co-religionists in their home villages; fearful and outnumbered, their repeated calls for reinforcements ignored by the UN and by NATO, the Dutch UN troops meekly handed over to Ratko Mladic, the Bosnian Serb military commander, those who had sought refuge in their so-called 'safe haven'. All the men and children aged 12 to 77 were then separated from their mothers, wives and siblings



and driven in lorries to their death. Those who had earlier sought to escape into the hills were ruthlessly pursued and shot.

Despite all this, it was inspiring to see how survivors and relatives of those who died continue to proclaim a message of peace and reconciliation based on justice. In the vast cemetery adjacent to the UN Compound of Srebrenica, we were privileged to meet three of the Mothers of Srebrenica. One of these, Hatidza Mehmedovic, inspired and moved us deeply by welcoming us warmly. 'They killed everything I had in this world. They killed my two sons and I live alone today. But I feel less alone when I see my friends coming here, visiting me. Looking at you I can see my sons, I can see my daughters. We must fight that the genocide never happens again anywhere in the world. It is the ordinary people who suffer... We can't return the past

... it was inspiring to see how survivors and relatives of those who died continue to proclaim a message of peace and reconciliation based on justice.

but we can all work together to build a better future.'

Such courage and commitment from ordinary people whose lives have been shattered provide us with hope that, despite everything, a better future can be built. If the mothers of Srebrenica can believe and work for this, we must surely be strengthened and inspired to do likewise. And never, never forget that it has happened and, sadly, continues to happen.

Erik Pearse
Secretary, Interfaith Wolverhampton
Member, Archdiocesan (Roman Catholic) Commission for Interreligious Dialogue

Remembering Srebrenica

On 13th July 2015 a service of remembrance was held at St. Peter's Church, Wolverhampton. Rev Preb David Wright welcomed everyone and introduced the Deputy Mayor Councilor Barry Findlay. He concluded by saying that "remember never become complacent; it could happen anywhere".

Paul Salahuddin Armstrong, a recent visitor to Srebrenica, gave a very moving personal account of what he had observed there.

One of the mothers from Srebrenica Remembers was read by Fiona Brennon. This was very emotional and painful to hear.

There was a period of silence followed by Muslim prayers read by Akeel Ahmed He concluded by praying that Lord Almighty grants justice to all those who have suffered injustice ,in particular the people of Bosnia, and establish peace in the world.

A Jewish prayer was read by Doreen Brandes and it conveyed a very similar message of peace in all communities.

Sikh Kirtan by Chamandeep Kaur accompanied by Giani Shyam and Harpreet Kaur playing tabla epitomised calm and peace.

A Hindu prayer was read by me, conveying a similar message of peace to all: let peace fill our heart,our world, our universe. A Buddhist prayer read by Vidya Kumari Midha invoked Buddha's mercy to be at our head, the Dhamma in our hearts and Sangha at our side to protect and guide us always.



A Christian Prayer was read by Jenner Martin pleading for world peace.

Lighting of candles and prayers were led by David Wright and concluding thoughts by Dr Harun Rashid . He said that we are all waiting for our time for our one way ticket, we have to get on a plane never to return. So we need to be caring ,loving and peaceful to one another.

The congregation of approximately 35 recited Srebrenica prayers

A Hindu prayer was read by me, conveying a similar message of peace to all: let peace fill our heart,our world, our universe.

*We pray to almighty God
May grievance become hope
May revenge become justice
May mothers' tears become prayers
That Srebrenica never happens again to no one - nowhere*

Parveen Brigue

Trips to Places of Worship

Interfaith Wolverhampton was pleased to arrange trips to places of worship for members of the Wolverhampton Federation of Tenants' Associations. This was part of the Fed's project under the Near Neighbours 'Bringing People Together' programme.

Near Neighbours is a charity set up to bring people together who are near neighbours in communities that are religiously and ethnically diverse, so that they can get to know each other better, and build relationships of trust to work together to improve the communities that they live in. The second principle that ignited my imagination was the stress on the presence of divinity all around me. The sanctity of life, the need to preserve the natural environment, to treat others with empathy and to practise non-injury to others has significantly shaped my thinking and the way I live.

On 6th March 2015 Jaswinder Chaggar, from Inter Faith, organised a trip for Fed members to visit 2 Gurdwaras in the City. First he took them to the Guru Nanak Gurdwara at Well Lane in Wednesfield, followed by the Guru Nanak Satsang Gurdwara on the Cannock Road. The Fed members were very appreciative of the friendly welcome and hospitality that they received including refreshments in the Langar community kitchens.

A further trip took place on 16th June 2015 where Jas took Fed members to the Shri Krishna Mandir Temple



Near Neighbours is a charity set up to bring people together who are near neighbours in communities that are religiously and ethnically diverse...

(Hindu place of worship) on the Penn Road, and the Guru Teg Bahadur (Sikh place of worship) at Upper Villiers Street. Jas is pictured below with members of the Fed.

Reflections on Laudato Si' A letter from Pope Francis

In June, Pope Francis published an encyclical – a circular letter. It was not addressed simply to Catholics, nor to the wider Christian family, but instead Pope Francis deliberately wrote his letter to “every living person on the planet” (#4).

What he says, therefore, concerns all of us and in fact requires a response from all. The reason Pope Francis wishes to engage in dialogue with every person whatever their personal faith, is that he sees the world as being in a state of crisis. The solution to that crisis cannot be met by one group of people, but demands that each person take responsibility for what is happening and works with others to address the current critical situation.

So what does the encyclical say? Space does not allow me to go into details, but here I present an overview of the six chapters. The title of the encyclical means “praised be” which are the first words of a canticle written by St Francis of Assisi, a twelfth-century Catholic friar. In this canticle, St Francis praises all of creation. As the Pope states, St Francis reminds us “that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us” (#1). However, our sister now cries out to us because of our desire to plunder and extract from the earth to satisfy our greed. That is why the Pope recognises the need to “enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (#3) and that this dialogue needs to include everyone (#14). He acknowledges that different Christian communities and different religious

communities have enriched the Catholic Church’s thinking on environmental issues (#7). Pope Francis quotes the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew from the Orthodox tradition who sees the environmental crisis as having ethical and spiritual roots which require a change in humanity. There is a need to “replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing” (#9).

In the first chapter What is happening to our common home, Pope Francis gives an overview of some of the symptoms of the crisis which humanity and creation are experiencing – pollution, waste, the throwaway culture, climate change, loss of biodiversity, global inequality and the decline of the quality of human life and the breakdown of society. For the Pope, the deterioration of the environment and the deterioration of society are inextricably linked, and both affect the most vulnerable on the planet (#48). We need to open our eyes and ears and be receptive to both the cry of the earth and of the poor (#49).

Chapter two is entitled The Gospel of Creation and here Pope Francis draws on the wisdom of Christian tradition and text, though of course acknowledging that all religions have their texts and wisdom to offer. It is these texts and wisdom which may be a source of

inspiration and motivation for those who belong to religious communities –it may lead them to see that a positive relationship with nature is an essential part of their faith. Ancient stories from the Christian tradition, like those from other faith traditions, teach us that “everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others” (#70). We are all linked by unseen bonds and so we are part of a universal family.



In chapter three, the human roots of the ecological crisis are examined. The Pope acknowledges that there have been great technological developments, but these have not always gone hand in hand with human responsibility and integral values (#105). We live in a culture where there seems to be an unquestioned understanding that growth is unlimited and should be pursued at all costs. This he suggests, has come about through humans putting themselves at the centre – their own needs, desires and conveniences.

Chapter four focuses on integral ecology – the fact that everything is interconnected and interrelated, and that all created things are part of living network.

Chapter five looks towards what action can be taken towards finding solutions to the enormous ecological degradation and self-destruction which is taking place. The Pope suggests that an acknowledgement of our interdependence requires us to think of ourselves as one world, and to use our ingenuity to conceive a common plan together (#164). This would need to include, at the very least, global investment in renewable energy and a severe reduction in greenhouse gases. For those

of us who live in the UK and other countries that have benefitted from high density industrialisation, this responsibility is all the greater. There is an urgent need “for politics and economics to enter into frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life” (#189). Progress needs to be redefined.

Since Laudato Si’ is addressed to all, I would encourage all of you to read it, reflect and engage with it. Whatever your faith background, this text will speak to you.

In the last chapter of the encyclical, Pope Francis puts forward the idea that our challenge is “cultural, spiritual and educational” (#202). Since there is a moral imperative to assess the impact of each action we take (#208), a paradigm shift is needed to dislodge our cycles of compulsive consumerism and for this, a change of heart is needed (# 218). The encyclical ends with two prayers, one which can be said by Christians, another which could be said by all those who believe God is the all-powerful creator.

Since Laudato Si’ is addressed to all, I would encourage all of you to read it, reflect and engage with it. Whatever your faith background, this text will speak to you. Pope Francis encourages us all “to be instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents” (#13). Together let us take up this invitation.

Dr Susy Brouard
Theology Programme Advisor in CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development)

The Urgent Question of Climate Change

The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. To hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

Humanity is called to recognise the need for changes in lifestyle, production and consumption.

Encyclical letter, Laudato Si’, “On care for our Common Home”. June 2015.

We are all called to care for the earth and have a responsibility to live creatively and sustainably in a world of finite resources.

Lambeth Declaration. June 2015.

The climate of the earth is warming, so far by 0.8 degrees centigrade since the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century. The great majority of climate scientists state that we must keep this continuing rise in temperature to below a 2 degrees centigrade increase if we are to avoid triggering non-linear tipping points and run-away global warning.

The environmental effects would be catastrophic with more violent and frequent extreme weather events, rising sea-levels, acidification of the oceans, loss of eco-systems and bio-diversity, enormous disruption to agriculture, forestry and national economies and myriad other ripple effects. The causes for global warming are complex and inter-related but 97% of climate scientists agree that the major driver is greenhouse gas emissions mainly derived from the burning of fossil fuels. We are now in the geological age of the Anthropocene where man is the main agent impacting on eco-systems and bringing about massive environmental changes.

This coming December the international Conference of the Parties, COP 21, meets in Paris to establish global policies to mitigate and adapt to global warming. Realistic, fair and legally binding carbon emission reduction targets and time tables to achieve a zero carbon world economy are wanted. New money for climate finance and technical aid for developing countries must be provided from rich countries who are historically responsible for most carbon emissions and who are still on a per capita basis the main culprits. The principle that the polluter pays must be applied.

The task is great. The environmental situation is already very serious. Yet most world political and economic leaders, especially the global corporations, continue to preach and practise business as usual, seeking evermore economic growth, seemingly oblivious to the fact that if everyone were to enjoy the lifestyle of the average western citizen we would need the resources of at least two planet earths. The dominant ideas of the economic and political elites are that nature is a resource to be exploited, everything that was once part of the commons

can be commodified, the free market and profit motive should reign supreme, technology can solve all problems and the production and endless consumption of consumer goods and services are the main purpose of life. Despite the considerable success of the millennium development goals in removing over one billion people out of extreme poverty economic inequality is still increasing in most countries and over 800 million people still live in permanent hunger.

A counter narrative to this technological and materialist understanding of the world is that provided by eco-theology. Each world religion in its traditions, ritual practices, beliefs and scriptures has intimate connections to the environmental conditions in which it developed. The earth is often seen as a mother and humans work with nature and the rhythms of the seasons to gain their livelihoods. The Harvard project concludes that seven common values can be ascertained from studying how world religions relate to the environment. These values are reverence, respect, reciprocity, restraint, redistribution, responsibility and restoration, and they have all become mantras of the Green Movement.



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The life of St Francis of Assisi is an inspiration to the world. Guided by his influence, the present Pope Francis in his recent encyclical "On care for our common home" is indignant about our consumerist, "throwaway culture", the "rapidification" of global capitalism, the myriad pollutants and health hazards, and the vast amount of waste-making desecrating our earth to "an immense pile of filth". He calls for less greed and extravagance and for nations to concentrate on satisfying

people's basic needs for wholesome food, clean water, shelter, clothing and clean energy rather than their wants and aspirations for more and more consumer luxury goods and services. In the West we need no further economic growth but post growth economic strategies.

The Lambeth declaration on climate change signed by most faiths in England also calls for more urgent action to counter climate change. Interfaith groups, alongside environmental and developmental pressure groups, can provide the moral impetus to persuade and urge world leaders to deliver radical solutions at the Paris conference.

As part of the build-up to the Paris climate conference a small group went to London on 17th June 2015 on a coach organised by Interfaith Wolverhampton for the Climate Lobby, "Speak up for the love of". According to the Guardian newspaper around 9000 constituents lobbied 300 or so MPs. Our group met with our three Wolverhampton MPs for a brief exchange of views and we provided them with several hand outs as to how they might get involved in bringing about the many changes that the Climate Coalition, who organised the event, was seeking. Rob Marris, MP for Wolverhampton South West, successfully argued in the debates prior to the Climate Change Act of 2008 to include adequate finance and appropriate measures to adapt to climate change already taking place. He was asked to continue to pursue this vital aspect of taking adaptive, precautionary measures.

There are many ways we can all individually decrease our carbon and environmental footprints. Working with

others in the many communities and organisations to which we belong we can take group and institutional steps to cut harmful impacts on the environment. But at a national level our energy, industrial, agricultural and transport infrastructures have to be radically transformed. We must move from dirty fossil fuels, especially coal, to clean renewable energy. As a priority, investment in, and all subsidies related to fossil fuels must be rapidly phased out to be replaced by investment in and support for renewable energy, including more research and development and energy conservation measures. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change states that 66% of known extractable fossil fuels must be left in the ground if we are to avoid dangerous climate change. Hence, there can be no place for fracking, for increasing air transport capacity at Heathrow or at other London airports nor for more subsidies for North Sea oil extraction. The good news is that the fossil fuel divestment movement continues to grow and popular support for green and all sustainable life-styles is gaining momentum.

World decisions to be made this year are critical. Strong statements on climate change must be included in the new sustainable development goals to be finalised at the UN in New York this September. Finally, and to repeat, radical, robust, fair and legally-binding measures, backed by new and adequate funding must be established to tackle the climate crisis at the UN conference in Paris this December.

Paul Abbs
Chair, Wolverhampton World Poverty Action Group

Reflections on Interfaith Involvement

My involvement with Interfaith Wolverhampton goes back to 3rd May 2006 when I was appointed as the Strategic Planning and Development Officer for what was then known as the, Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group. The buzz words at that time was, Community Cohesion although this concept is still current.

At that time there were three thematic faith representational groups in Wolverhampton. The first I have already named above, the second and third were Faith Network and Faith Regeneration Unit. As you can imagine this created a lot of confusion and I was tasked with the job of trying to create an environment whereby these three could either coexist more efficiently or even amalgamate.

In an attempt to create a working environment the Officers of Interfaith had already formed Wolverhampton Faith Partnership. This was an internal coalition of representatives from all three thematic groups. During our early meetings we looked at Mission Statements and Organisational Profiles and from this we produced what was termed, 'A Declaration Statement'.

As time went on it became clear that the main role of

the Faith Network and Faith Regeneration Unit was basically the same. One was predominantly developing the usage of Christian Church buildings and the other doing the same but with other faiths that exist within the City.

Concentrating on these two groups a procedure was agreed whereby they could amalgamate. The procedure centred mainly on combining the two constitutions. Eventually this was complete and at respective meetings in January 2008 the merger was agreed. The newly constituted group was to be known as Wolverhampton Regeneration Network.

By this time changes had also occurred to the name of Interfaith itself. Instead of being known as Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group we became known as Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Council.

From three to two representational groups now existed within the City and after many months of intense negotiating it was finally agreed that the two should become one. On the 1st October 2010 this became a reality.

The newly constituted group would be named, Wolverhampton Inter-Faith and Regeneration Network. Rather a long title name, but it was intended to be a merger and not a takeover.

As time went by the funding came to an end for all regeneration work. Once again after careful consideration and full agreement at our 2014 AGM it was agreed that we should be known as, Interfaith Wolverhampton. Now we had a simple easy to use name that suited everyone.

Personally I feel a sense of privilege at being at the forefront and instigator of many of these changes. I recall that at the AGM when the merger of Interfaith and Regeneration was agreed I was able to report, 'mission accomplished'. My task had been completed as the, Strategic Planning and Development Officer, albeit my title role name had and has continued to change many times during my years in the office.

There are three words that spring to my mind when I think of the impact my work has had on my thinking.



These three words that I have borrowed from a distinguished member of Interfaith, Mr Gurdev Rai are: Rights, Respect, Responsibility.

Because I now understand so much more about other faiths my horizons have widened. It has made me look more closely at my own faith and in doing so it has strengthened it. It has made me consider the rights to belief of others and learn to respect them. In the process I believe it has helped me to become a more responsible person. It has also helped me to understand that there are many commonalities between the differing faiths, commonalities that help to consolidate the unity within the faith communities that exist within our great, City of Wolverhampton.

I have heard it said that, 'Interfaith Wolverhampton is run by a number of well-meaning gentlemen of all faiths as a club for chit chat'. We all know just how wrong this image is and that the implications of our work are extensive and far-reaching. Nevertheless it is a perception that we need to address and to change. One way in which we can do this is to become even more outgoing than we already are. We must take Interfaith

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into the wider community and help them to understand the importance of our work ; to understand that as an organisation our role is not to promote faith, but to the understanding of many faiths that exist within our City and beyond.

In some ways we already achieve this by our, 'School Visits to Places of Worship' programme. Organising visits to Places of Worship on behalf of local schools. Interfaith Wolverhampton owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to Rev Jim McManus for his dedicated pioneering work in this area over many years.

Recently we instigated a programme whereby we take our work into schools doing presentations on Interfaith

and the differing faiths. Plans are afoot to also develop this programme into the wider community. I believe that this aspect of our work is a priority that the board must pursue.

World events show quite graphically the need for continued and sustained faith interactions. Interfaith Wolverhampton has the ability and the experience to become the leader in promoting dialogue as well as

other means ways of breaking down faith social barriers, barriers that are sometimes erected by well-meaning people of faith. The way forward is to be proactive. All of us must make a concerted effort in friendship and love for our Local, National and International Communities. In doing so we all serve our God to the best of our abilities.

Mike Shelley-Smith

Shree Krishan Temple, Wolverhampton donates to Nepal Earthquake Relief Fund

The Management Committee of Shree Krishan Mandir (a Hindu Temple), 123 Penn Road, Wolverhampton raised £5000.00 from their congregations to help the victims of Nepal Earthquake. Mr Satya Pal Sharma, the General Secretary, along with other Committee Members of the Temple handed over the cheque to Mr Tej Bahadur Chhetri, Chargé d'affaires, at the Embassy of Nepal in London.



Visit to the National Holocaust Centre

When writing this I heard through the media about the 94 year old Nazi official who was sentenced to four years in prison. Some survivors held the opinion that it would have been a more suitable sentence if he had been required do some community service and speak about the Holocaust. This would have helped the people not to forget the atrocities committed against the Jews and some other minority groups suffered. To help us in this country not to forget the National Holocaust Centre and Museum was opened in 1995.

On Thursday 4th June 2015, Interfaith Wolverhampton made a Pilgrimage visit to this Centre. One reason for the trip was to show our solidarity with our Jewish 'neighbours' on the 70th anniversary of the holocaust.

Our minibus left promptly. And we enjoyed the scenery on the way to the northeast. Our journey was longer than expected. The route chosen, certainly unintentionally, was very circuitous but the extra 2

hours gave us the opportunity to appreciate more of the Nottinghamshire scenery!

This didn't really mar the day, it just made it more intense. On arrival, we were just in time for the talk given by a holocaust survivor. We were together in the audience with a school class when Steve Mendelsohn 89years old originally from Breslau told his story. He was 6 years old when Hitler came to power. We heard what it meant to him and his family.

He told very vividly about the group of his friends. They were 8 lads and then one day seven deserted him. He found it very difficult to go to school after that but soon he was not allowed to go anyway. They were tough times. Luckily for him and his brother, they were in the children's transport and came to Britain. About 10 000 children were received by Britain and thereby survived.



I recommend this visit to everyone as a spiritually enriching experience.

Again it was interesting to hear his experiences when he and other children first arrived here. Obviously many of the children found all this very exciting and assumed that the separation from their parents wouldn't be too long. We know, of course, how most of them ended up becoming orphans. Steve and his brother were the lucky ones who saw their parents again following the release of their father from Buchenwald.

After the talk it was really interesting to hear the excellent questions the 8-9 year old school children asked. One question being, if he met again those seven friends, would he forgive them. It was very emotional

listening to Steve's story.

Equally moving was viewing the exhibition downstairs where many sad stories were told and pictures shown.

We were then taken by the guide upstairs where we entered a typical sitting room of a Jewish family of that time and also could visit a reconstructed attic where Jews could be hidden.

Of course we also managed to enjoy the 'obligatory coffee and cake' in the centre's café and visit their bookshop.

On the way out we walked through the Rose garden. There are nearly one thousand white roses growing in the grounds. The idea of the garden was to give victims and survivors a little dignity. Each rose has an inscribed plaque. This shows very movingly that the victims are real human beings with names, not just statistics.

I was pleased that I had this chance to visit the Centre. It showed the depth of depravity human beings are capable of descending but it also demonstrated very well the immense heights of goodness that we are capable of reaching.

I recommend this visit to everyone as a spiritually enriching experience.

Rev Seija Wallace
Cranmer Methodist Church &
St Andrew's Church of England

Visit to the National Holocaust Memorial Centre Nottingham

As a member of Interfaith Wolverhampton. I would like to say a huge 'thank you' on behalf of my daughter Lisa and myself for being invited by Mike Shelley-Smith to attend the outing to the National Holocaust Memorial Centre and Museum on the 4th June 2015.

Although later than originally planned time of our arrival, we were welcomed by the very caring staff who made sure that we did not miss any of the exhibitions. We were invited to participate in with a school in a most interesting talk given by Steven Mendelson who came to England on the 'Kinder transport' or Children's Transport. It was a special train to take the children out of Germany so as to avoid Nazi persecution. As a small boy Steve found it a long, lonely

journey from Germany to England. Steve was one of the lucky ones who through the tenacity of his parents was able to come here and was given a home. Sometime later he was able to meet up with his parents in the UK. Others who weren't able to make the journey didn't survive the holocaust.

Steve gave us an insight into what life was like in Germany under Nazi rule. How suddenly he was ignored by all his former friends just because he was

Jewish. His friends' parents had had told them not to play or even to talk with the Jewish children. Hatred of Jews was taught in the classrooms at school. Soon Steve became the object of ridicule and abuse.

We saw many artefacts on display in the exhibitions. Pictures on the walls gave an insight into the historical situation and events.

The talk was under the heading, '**The Journey**' and was particularly moving, as its objective was aimed at talking to the children present through the eyes of a child who had experienced family life in Germany in 1938 onwards

We enjoyed a snack in the coffee shop served by friendly staff, but all too soon it was time to make our way home

For Lisa and I it was a valuable memorable day as I am sure it was for others on our outing.

Sadly our late arrival meant that we were not able to



stroll through the memorial gardens or to visit the museum. Some had asked if we could leave later so that we had a little more time, but then others, myself included had to get back because of other commitments.

We saw many artefacts on display in the exhibitions. Pictures on the walls gave an insight into the historical situation and events.

It was a special day and I know that someday we will return there and build on the experience we had.

Mary and Lisa Hutton

Treasures of the Ivy Gutridge Collection

(Located in the Faith Section in the Central Library)

Muslims Ask, Christians Answer

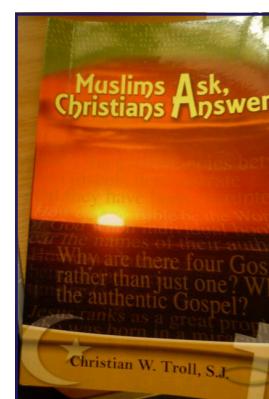
By Christian W. Troll

Troll, C. W. 2012. *Muslims Ask, Christians Answer*. New York: New City Press.

ISBN 978-1-56548-430-6

Are Christians prepared to give an adequate, sensitive and respectful account of their own faith in discussion with Muslims?" Fr Troll suspects not, and seeks in this short book (146 pages) to give them some understanding of the faith and sensitivity of Muslims, and some guidance as to how to meet Muslim questions about Christianity honestly and sympathetically.

The present volume has a history behind it, having come out of a Christian discussion group in Tunisia which started meeting as long ago as 1974, leading to the book *Trying to Answer*



Questions, published in English in 1989. The book was substantially re-written to suit a German context in 2002 before this American translation and revision of 2012. In each of these settings it has come out of

long discussions between Christian academics with considerable experience and knowledge of Islam.

The book is laid out in twelve chapters, with subjects which vary from the general such as prayer or “Religion and the World” to such specific issues as The Eucharist and celibacy. The pattern of the first eleven chapters is to lay out common Muslim questions on the issue concerned, to describe the perspectives that lie behind those questions, and to relate those to overall Christian perspectives before proceeding to the answers. The twelfth deals with the more general question “what is the heart of Christianity?” Many of these questions could equally be described as challenges, such as “Don’t the discrepancies between the Gospels demonstrate that they have been corrupted?”, and it is as well for Christians to have thought about how they may respond.

It is not a description of a dialogue; it always gives Christians the last word and does not give Muslims voices of their own, but it does what it sets out to do. The questions would be recognised by any Christian who mixes with Muslims, and I guess many will have felt dissatisfied with the answer they have given, either because the question came on the spur of the moment and the answer was ill thought-out, or because an



answer that might have been expected to satisfy the questioner clearly has not. This book prepares against the first of these problems, and, by giving guidance as to the issues that lie behind the question, helps reduce the risk of the second. In the process it lays out for Christians a lot of Islamic teaching and practice. It is

The book is laid out in twelve chapters, with subjects which vary from the general such as prayer or “Religion and the World” to such specific issues as The Eucharist and celibacy..

clearly Catholic in tone, though as is demonstrated in the chapter on celibacy it makes a generous attempt to comprehend Protestant viewpoints. My two hesitations are that, even bearing in mind its Christian purpose and target audience, Muslim engagement in its development would have given more confidence in it; and a lingering suspicion that dialogue, friendship and even evangelism are better served by wrestling together with the things we do not know or find difficult to express rather than having carefully worked out answers available off the shelf.

Revd. John Barnett

Iftar at the Birmingham Central Mosque

Wolverhampton, as we know, is a diverse city with many religions and ethnicities present within our community. Since a young age I have been thoroughly appreciative of different cultures, having many close friends from Asian Muslim descent as well as West Indian and African Christians.

I have always had great respect for different religions, but nothing has confirmed this respect as much as my recent visit to the Birmingham Central Mosque.

All four walls were lined with elegant bookcases, full to the brim with hundreds of copies of the Islamic Holy Scriptures. Around us were many people; some sitting, some standing, some walking around. They were all deep in thought and prayer, reflecting upon

the words written in each copy of the Holy Qur'an that they were holding. We had been led to this room by a senior member of the Mosque's own congregation. He welcomed us warmly at the door and showed us around the building. He explained how the building was used by the people who visited, spending a lot of time meditating on the scriptures.

The visiting group from Interfaith Wolverhampton

and I were then led upstairs to a room from which we could observe everything happening inside the main prayer room. We watched as the congregation gathered to say prayers together lead by one of the Mosque's many Imams. After this we were invited downstairs to meet with the Mosque's director. He talked to us in a conference room about the daily practice of Islam and answered all the questions, which we had. The Head

The experience of visiting a Mosque during Ramadan and witnessing the practice of another faith was eye opening to me. Everybody there made us thoroughly welcome as if we were regular visitors...

Imam also joined us to answer our questions and to give us a very pleasant explanation of what their beliefs are and how it is similar to all other Abrahamic faiths.

Being the month of Ramadan, an Iftar was taking place downstairs in a large room. The Iftar is the breaking

of the daily fast during the Holy month of Ramadan, where many people eat their first meal of the day as well as taste the first drink. The area was full of many people, most sat in lines on the floor, and we were sat at the head of the room on a table with the Imams and dignitaries from the Mosque. We shared wonderful food from the many different areas where the Mosque's congregation members originate from. Most of the food was Asian and donated by members of the Mosque. I tried delicious foods that I had never come across before. We were then invited back into the main prayer room to sit with the congregation as they began another prayer. We listened to the Imam's voice ring throughout the room, and then continued with the food and conversation downstairs until it was time to leave.

The experience of visiting a Mosque during Ramadan and witnessing the practice of another faith was eye opening to me. Everybody there made us thoroughly welcome as if we were regular visitors, and I could not describe a more peaceful and inviting atmosphere than the one my family and I experienced at the Birmingham Central Mosque.

**Will Wright
St. John's in the Square**

Patrons

Interfaith Wolverhampton has four new patrons:

- Her Majesty's ex-Lord -Lieutenant of West Midlands Paul Sabapathy CBE
 - The Mayor of Wolverhampton (Councillor Ian Brookfield)
 - Keith Bradshaw DL (Deputy Lord Lieutenant and prospective High Sheriff of the West Midlands) – in his personal capacity
 - Dr Satya Sharma DL, MBE (Deputy Lord Lieutenant of the West Midlands) – in his personal capacity.
-

Dates for your Diary

Tuesday October 20th
(12.45-2.00pm) Bring and Share Lunch*

Monday October 26th
(From 7.00pm) **"Meet & Mingle"**
(organised by W'ton City of Sanctuary)
at the Light House Media Centre, The Chubb Buildings,
Fryer Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1HT. City of
Sanctuary is a national movement to build a culture
of hospitality for people seeking sanctuary in the UK,
supported locally by Interfaith Wolverhampton.
Further details to follow.

Wednesday October 28th
(7 00pm) **"Jewish Spirituality"* With Rabbi Natan Levy**
First of five talks, each from a different faith
perspective, at the Newman Centre, Church of
St.Thomas of Canterbury, Haywood Drive, WV6 8RF.
With a meal beforehand and discussion after.

Wednesday November 4th
(7 00pm) **"Hindu Spirituality", with Ram Aithal***
Second of five talks, each from a different faith
perspective, at the Newman Centre, Tettenhall.

Monday November 9th
(2.00pm Not 1:30pm
as previously stated) **Prayers for Peace**
at St.Peter's Collegiate Church

November 15th - 21st **InterFaith Week**

Tuesday November 17th
(12.45-2.00pm) Bring and Share Lunch*

Wednesday November 18th
(7 00pm) **"Muslim Spirituality", with Imam Ali Akbar***
Third of five talks, each from a different faith
perspective, at the Newman Centre, Tettenhall.

Saturday November 21st
(11.00am - 3.00pm)

Conference on Human Rights

Keynote Speaker: Kate Allen, Director of Amnesty International UK. Venue: Wolverhampton University.
[Please note change of date].

Wednesday November 25th
(7 00pm)

"Buddhist Spirituality", with Ven. Tejwant*

Fourth of five talks, each from a different faith perspective, at the Newman Centre, Tettenhall.

Wednesday December 2nd
(7 00pm)

"Sikh Spirituality", with Jaswinder S. Chaggar*

Last of five talks, each from a different faith perspective, at the Newman Centre, Tettenhall.

*Bring and Share Lunches will all be at "Darlington Street Methodist Centre", 24 School Street, WV1 4LF, but the room used will depend on availability

*Download further details and Booking Form from ifwton.org.uk/SpiritualityTalksBookingForm2015.pdf.



Devi off work

Devi will be resting at home for several weeks from September 16th following an operation . We send her our very best wishes for a prompt recovery. She will be sorely missed!

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