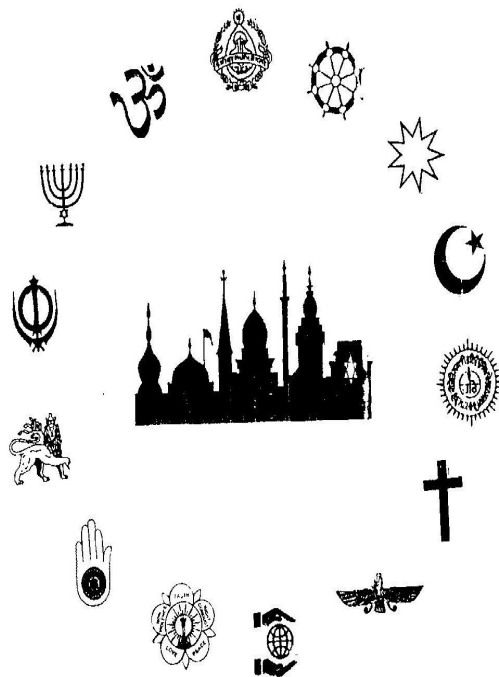


**FAITHS WORKING IN HARMONY,  
LOVE AND PEACE**



**1974-1999**  
**WOLVERHAMPTON**  
**INTER-FAITH**  
**GROUP**

**25** Years and  
Counting

Forward into The next  
Millennium

**TOGETHER!**

Established 1974

Reg. Charity No. 513201

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*Message & Blessings*

*From*

*His Divine Holiness Sahib Sri Hazoor Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji Maharaj,  
(The Supreme Spiritual Head of the Namahari Sikhs)*

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***It gives me great pleasure to send a message of goodwill to  
Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group (WIFG) on the  
celebrations of their Silver Jubilee.***

***The WIFG is making a sterling effort in working for the  
mutual respect, inter-faith amity and building bridges of  
understanding between people and communities of different  
faiths in the United Kingdom.***

***During my visit in July 1989 to your offices in  
Wolverhampton, I was impressed by the zeal, vigour and  
dedication of your group in maintaining friendly relations  
with all the World's religious Organisations.***

***The members of the WIFG are the "Cream of Religion"  
and they are doing what all religions should be doing to  
create harmony and world peace.***

***As Guru Arjan says in the Adi Granth Sahib,***

***"Sabhey sajhivnaal sadayin toon kisey n disey bahra jiu "***

***i.e.***

***" You dwell deep within each and every heart.  
All share in Your Grace, none are beyond you."***

***and***

***The Guru Nanak prayer,***

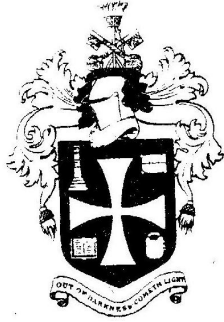
***"Tere bhane 'sarbat' da 'bhala' " meaning,***

***"By Your Grace may All be Blessed"***

***in real sense is the prayer adopted by the Inter-Faith group  
and I pray to the Almighty so that you adhere to it, and may  
Satguru Ji give you strength to carry on your selfless work  
in earnest devotion.***

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#### A MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR.

As the first citizen of Wolverhampton, it gives me immense pleasure to write this short message for the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group's Silver Jubilee Celebration booklet.

Since its birth, 25 years ago, the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group has been working tirelessly for inter-racial, inter-cultural and inter-religious understanding, leading to lasting peace, harmony and friendship in this great Borough of ours.

Initially, the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group had to fight against many odds for justice and fairness. As years went by, the task became slightly easier for the Group because more and more individuals and institutions became sensitive to the needs of a growing diverse multi-cultural society in Wolverhampton. In the seventies and early eighties, religious communities had to face an uphill task to find a place of worship of their own.

Because of the sensitive and yet determined approach of the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group, things began to move, and move fast.

Wolverhampton now possesses many places of worship, belonging to the Sikhs, the Muslims, the Hindus, the Buddhists and many other faiths.

These places of worship are giving very loud and clear signals that Wolverhampton is proud of its diversity of cultures as they are enriching the socio-economic life of the Borough.

The conferences, seminars, meetings organised by the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group, the resources such as the Directory of Places of Worship, the tape/slide show, the photographic exhibitions produced by the Group - to name just a few - and the informal and formal advice offered by the Group over the past 25 years, have built many bridges and helped enormously to create a truly tension-free, harmonious Wolverhampton, in which we all live together in peace today.

However, we must not be complacent as there is still a lot to achieve. Future projects are needed to extend learning further by celebrating diversity and promoting an even better understanding of each others differences. The more informed we are the more tolerant and appreciative we become.

I congratulate the Inter-Faith Group on all that it has achieved so far and pledge my continuing support, and that of the Council, to its ongoing work, as we move forward together to create a more respectful and more harmonious community for the New Millennium.

Councillor Peter Bilson  
Mayor of Wolverhampton  
1999/2000

## A WORD FROM OUR PATRON

When I think of all the Inter-Faith reports and stories I have written over the years, I hardly know where and how to find an appropriate way to inspire those whose job it will be to lead us into the future. I do hope there will be many of them.

One needful message should be to encourage leaders and members, especially young people, to be faithful to the faith they hold, and be ready to learn from people of all faiths. Also to be ready to offer their time and talents in the cause of peaceful action.

I am reminded of a friend I met in Australia at a peace conference. He had written many hymns and songs for peace. One hymn I remember, which we included in a Peace Service held at St. Peter's, said in the last verse:

"There are times when every person has to choose,  
And times when nations cannot see ahead.  
Let us choose the peaceful way of justice for the poor  
And act upon the prayers we choose to pray."

As I bow out of active work, except for welcoming visitors and washing up, I offer my heartfelt thanks to countless friends who have supported our work over the years.

I end with words I wrote many years ago:

"I see the growth of Inter-Faith Groups and Inter-Faith Dialogue as the way God is moving us towards the possibility of a peaceful, revitalised world, where diversity is celebrated as part of GOD's plan for his creation."

Yours in Peace and Love

Ivy Gutridge



JASWINDER SINGH M.A. (History)

Member S. G. P. D.  
Sri Amritsar  
2348/6, Raja Park  
Sakur Basti  
New Delhi - 110 034  
India  
04 September 1999

I, as a member of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Sri Amritsar, India, have great pleasure in sending my warm greetings and best wishes to all members of Wovamamoton Inter-Faith Group (WIFG), who will be celebrating the Group's Silver Jubilee function on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1999. I had the proud privilege of visiting WIFG in England and learning from the Group, about the Group's multifarious activities for promoting mutual respect for one another's faith and develop cordial relationship, mutual understanding, for creating harmony, justice and peace among the members and communities of multi-cultural and multi-faith society of Wovamamoton. WIFG is also credited to be one of the oldest and most active Inter-Faith Group currently working in Great Britain.

I have no doubt that the Group's dedicated service over the past 25 years has not only earned them much laurels and appreciation from the people of Wovamamoton, but it will also take them to the pinnacle of glory for bringing the much needed good will and inter-religious amity in the town of Wovamamoton and beyond in the years to come.

I sincerely hope and pray to Sri Sat Gurus that your noble effort will have many blessings from him for you all to carry forward your service in to the next millennium.

Jaswinder Singh  
Amritsar

## CHALLENGING TIMES AHEAD

Some ten years ago, a series of meetings were held between the Inter-Faith Group and the LEA's Multi-Cultural Education Service. I attended some of those meetings and the discourse that ensued on a number of multi-cultural, multi-faith matters intensified my interest in the activities of the Group. I found our conversations with Ivy Gutridge, Tim Fyffe and others so engaging that I decided to join it. I was actively encouraged to participate in the activities organised by the Inter-Faith Group by my colleague Harun Rashid who had been associated with this organisation since its inception. Our collaborative endeavours resulted in the production of several booklets on various minority ethnic faith communities.

Attendance at meetings in the homes of Board members was a new and refreshing experience. The mutual trust evident in discussions about sensitive matters was very re-assuring. I felt that most of the people at those meetings were receptive and open hearted. There was a good deal of listening taking place and people felt confident enough to be honest and frank about expressing their views and concerns. The discussions, sometimes protracted discussions, highlighted profound differences as well as common ground between different faiths. It brought home to me the fact that inter-faith dialogue is not saying that all religions are the same and, therefore, it does not lead to a dilution of one's faith. Dialogue with our neighbours of other faith communities helps us to move toward discoveries of truth not yet revealed to us. There is no intention here to syncretism or of the merging of all religions into one. There is no need for anyone to compromise their religious beliefs.

Of course, one sometimes comes across a tiny minority of people in the Group who have closed minds and who have convinced themselves that they, and they alone, have unimpeded access to God and the Ultimate Truth. That is not surprising.

One hopes that with regular exposure to other points of views at meetings and events, they might one day learn to appreciate the value of humility and throw open the windows of their minds.

What has impressed me most about the majority of people in the Inter-Faith Group is their commitment to fairness, equality and justice. Helping the troubled people in Bosnia, campaigning for Jubilee 2000, registering concern at the persecution of minority ethnic communities in India and Pakistan are but some of issues which have engaged many members of the Group and spurred them to take appropriate action. They have zealously raised their voice against discrimination and bigotry and their ideal of a turning our society into a better human community needs to be applauded.

Timely interventions to resolve conflicts is worthwhile but what is more worthwhile for me is the inter-reaction with a wide range of beliefs and cultures within the Inter-Faith community, so vitally important for learning, growth and mutual enhancement. Exploring personal, familial and societal issues from a variety of religious perspectives has been a very stimulating experience for me.

The Bhagvad Gita's message " *...have no hatred for any being at all; for all who do this shall come to me*" can be found in most of the holy books of other faiths. This is the core message the Inter-Faith Group wants to communicate to all communities because it is only through love, inclusive love and understanding that we can find lasting peace.

Sadly the increasing incidence of aggression, parochialism and bigotry in the world means that the need for work in Inter-Faith relations is not going to diminish in the foreseeable future. There will be many more mountains for our Group to climb but I am confident we can rise to new challenges.

**Sehdev Bismal**  
**Chairman**  
**1999/2000**

## The End of an Era!

### Achievements and Challenges.

It gives me great pleasure to contribute to the Silver Jubilee celebration of Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group and to record my sincere appreciation of the tremendous role that the Group has played in the life of Wolverhampton over these past 25 years.

Over this time the Wolverhampton community has changed a great deal. Cultural and racial harmony in our town is far more pronounced, and neighbours live side by side in a way which we could only dream about. The reality was that in the 1970's Enoch Powell's prediction of the late '60s had created a great time of racial intolerance and ill-will towards those who had come to live amongst us from the New Commonwealth. I remember working in the steelworks in Bilston during that period, when attitudes were very harsh and unbending.

I consider that Wolverhampton Inter-Faith played a crucial role through that period, in the churches, voluntary and community bodies, providing the leadership in combating racist and intolerant attitudes. By their vision and commitment they won the hearts and minds of many of our citizens to a belief in our community coming together and working together to gain respect for those of different race or creed.

The best way of celebrating the Silver Jubilee of the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group is to redouble our efforts to make the further progress which is necessary to truly achieve a community where everyone is valued, no matter what their race, creed or culture.

Dennis Turner MP  
Wolverhampton South-East.  
House of Commons.

One of the oldest, if not the oldest, of the minority communities of the Borough is the Wolverhampton Jewish Community. It was founded in the early half of the nineteenth century, although our records have failed to provide us with an exact date.

The present synagogue stands on a site in Fryer Street, opposite the "Chubb" building. The date on the Deeds document being 1856. After a fire in 1900, it was rebuilt in 1903. Previous to 1856, a synagogue was located in the Wolverhampton Horsley Fields area, in St. James' Square.

According to the inscriptions on some of the gravestones in the original cemetery in Cockshutt Lane, which are still legible, some are dated 1836. Some others, which are illegible, could be even older. The land on which this cemetery stands was donated to the Jewish Community by the Duke of Sutherland in 1851. As there were graves in this burial ground prior to 1851, it must be assumed that this land was used for a considerable time as a Jewish burial ground, before it was donated.

At its height, the community consisted of upwards of a hundred families, but over time the numbers have been depleted, and have dwindled to a handful of mostly elderly and single members.

Unable to support a Minister in recent years, Services have been conducted by lay readers. For High Holyday Services, members travel to Birmingham to join with fellow Co-religionists. For some time it has been realised that the upkeep and maintenance of the building was no longer feasible, and closure would be inevitable. Sadly, that time has now arrived and the synagogue building is to be sold.

The Wolverhampton Hebrew Congregation has been associated with the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group since its foundation and has always enjoyed a happy relationship with all of its participating religious groups.

Mr Len Brandes  
Founder Member WIFG

**Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group -  
As I have known it for the past 25 years.**

I, as one of the founding members of Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group (WIFG), take the privilege of strolling down memory lane, to describe how WIFG started, worked, matured and became one of the most active and highly regarded inter-faith groups in the United Kingdom.

WIFG came into being in March 1974, when race relations in Wolverhampton, stirred by the late Enoch Powell's "rivers of blood" speech, caused great concern to all. Christian Churches responded to the need of creating goodwill, and decided to contact the local faith community leaders. The immigrant faith communities co-operated with them whole-heartedly in their efforts in building friendship, community understanding, justice, peace and harmony. Many pioneer workers, belonging to all faiths, were able to create genuine and true inter-faith relationships. During the past 25 years we have not only been able to maintain these, but have further improved and expanded upon them to cover many other fields.

Our initial activities were very basic e.g. meeting and introducing ourselves to each other, visiting each others places of worship and learning about other faiths. Later on, we started organising meetings to discuss matters of common interest i.e. school dress for Muslim girls, the wearing of turbans by Sikh students in schools, religious education in school curriculums and learning about others ways of worship.

The Group also started an annual multi-faith, communal 'Prayer for Peace' service, at St. Peter's Church on various national and international issues for peace and justice, which is still held in January each year.

In 1975, WIFG, with extraordinary zeal and vigour, prepared an inter-faith photographic exhibition on "Ways of Worship in Wolverhampton".

It was very much appreciated and became an important 'resource' which attracted the attention of many of the educational institutions. This in turn led to WIFG's active involvement in teaching inter-faith education. Mrs Ivy Guttridge, one of the leading pioneers, started this involvement and was subsequently succeeded by Dr. Bando, our present Development Officer. Earlier, the Methodist Church had very kindly seconded a part time 'co-ordinator', the Revd. Inderjit Bhogal, to guide and streamline the activities of the Group. He did an excellent job, raising the name and profile of the Group.

WIFG, in collaboration with the local faith communities, is currently in the process of producing an updated 'colour' version of the photographic exhibition. This is nearing completion, with the dedicated effort of the Revd. Tim Fyffe.

WIFG have also published three editions of a 'Directory of Places of Worship' in Wolverhampton, the last in 1997. A revision for the millennium is currently in hand.

Substantial grants from the Church Urban Fund and the Methodist Church enabled us to appoint a Development Officer/Administrator. Dr Bando contacted schools, colleges and other educational institutions and organised visits to various places of worship, for their pupils. This earned considerable income for WIFG, significantly improving the financial position of the Group.

We celebrated our 20th Anniversary, in 1994 and published a booklet 'Memories and Visions' which was a great success and brought good publicity for the Group.

The work of WIFG was further appreciated that year, when Her Majesty the Queen awarded an MBE to Mrs Ivy Guttridge, long-time secretary of the Group. The award was in recognition of her own and the Group's excellent work in building bridges of understanding between the people and communities of different faiths and cultures, in the Town of Wolverhampton.

For the last twenty five years WIFG have successfully been able to advance knowledge, understanding, friendship, co-operation, justice and peace between the people and communities of different faiths and cultures.

The local Sikh communities, which are the largest among the Asian communities in Wolverhampton, alongside other faith communities have contributed enormously to support, help and expand WIFG's programme. At present more than 45 community groups of all faiths are affiliated to us. WIFG, by its hard work, has also been able to promote justice and look after the interest of the minority communities in many areas.

The Group's dedicated service has made deep impressions and friendships between the faith communities, and earned trust and confidence in the minds of the people of Wolverhampton. In July 1989, His Holiness Sahib Sri Satguru Jagjit Singh Ji Maharaj, supreme spiritual head of the Namdhari Sikh Community, visited WIFG and gave his divine blessings to all its members. He commented "WIFG is doing what all religions should be doing to create harmony and world peace." His Holiness was so deeply impressed with the workers of the Group, that he described them as "the cream of society". The Divine Holiness Satguru ji even now, from time to time, sends His Blessings and asks Namdhari Sikhs to contribute as fully as possible to the WIFG's multifarious programme.

Finally, I would like to say that WIFG continues to be in the forefront of issues on religion, peace and community harmony. There is as much need now for its presence and activity, as there was when the Group was founded. Generations may come and go, but the institutions remain. I therefore believe that all of us who believe in the value of inter-faith work must draw more of the younger generation to the group, so that they can work harder and uphold the inter-religious amity, love and friendship in this multi-faith and multi-cultural society of Great Britain in the years to come. Let all veterans, pioneers and experienced workers guide them and us in achieving our objectives.

Vasdev Singh Bhamrah  
Vice-Chairman 1998/1999

## Inter-Faith Memories and Experiences

My association with the Inter-Faith Group goes back to the time when it was first set up. It was thought it would be a desirable thing to set up an umbrella organisation in our town, which could help communities to promote unity in diversity and contribute to religious harmony and peace in our multi-faith society.

I was, at that time, President of the Shri Krishna Temple and I met with Reverend Neville Platten who was the inspiration behind the proposal to set up the Inter-Faith Group. He began the visionary process of bringing people from different faiths together and as a consequence the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group was set up in 1974.

### Why did I join?

My reasons for joining the Inter-Faith Group were as follows:

- (a) to acquire understanding of other faiths. Although I had some rudimentary knowledge of other beliefs and faiths I was looking for my knowledge to be extended.
- (b) to appreciate beliefs and practices different from what I was used to in my own Hindu faith.
- (c) I was also looking for an opportunity to share my beliefs with other people, to explain what it meant to be a Hindu.
- (d) to find out how we could collaboratively work together to dispel the ignorance permeating society at large. I wanted peace and harmony to be achieved, but based on understanding and without having to lose my own distinct identity.

#### How did we start?

We began meeting in the homes of people, learning about one another through conversation and personal contact.  
We started attending celebrations of different faiths such as Christmas, Baisakhi and Diwali.  
We also started visiting different places of worship in Wolverhampton and beyond.

The result was that we could engage in a dialogue without hurting each other's feelings.  
We could even joke about our differences without impinging on our friendship.

#### What is my Religion?

I am a Hindu by birth and I believe that religion is the binding force necessary for ensuring solidarity of society. Hinduism is the oldest religion and predates history.  
It has the capacity to accommodate diverse beliefs and ways of life. I was taught to respect prophets and great people from other faiths. This sort of readiness to accept others makes one receptive to other faiths. I believe my faith has equipped me well to contribute to inter-faith dialogue without having my faith diluted or weakened.  
King Ashoka, a 12th century Hindu King, once said:

**"He who does have reverence for his own sect while disparaging the sect of others with intent to enhance his own sect, in reality inflicts severe injuries on his own sect."**

Inter-faith initiatives play an important part in building bridges between communities.

#### What have I learned?

Dialogue with other faiths makes you realise that there are other people who are also trying to attain what you aspire to attain. We are going on parallel paths, but the destination is the same.  
Once you have grasped this truth, you will realise that you do not have a monopoly over truth.

You have no right to say that the people who are doing things in a different way are ignorant and that they will suffer in hell.  
Most people are searching for the same sort of things as you, i.e. happiness, contentment and peace within themselves.

Personal contact is the only way to get rid of your prejudices, and the only way to learn about others.

Many of the people I have come across, in my time with the Inter-Faith Group, are open minded and tolerant, although a minority have still a lot to learn.

We must not give up working towards ever greater dialogue, which is not about diminishing anyone's faith, but about building bridges and fostering understanding and appreciation for the rich diversity present in our society.

T. R. Bhardwaj.  
Founding Member

### We are also 25!

Coincidentally the West Midlands Probation Service has also passed the quarter century mark this year. In 1974 the Probation Services for the towns, cities and counties that merged to form the West Midlands were amalgamated to form a Probation Service with a head office in Birmingham.

Even though the West Midlands County Council was itself scrapped in the 1980s the regional Probation service has continued. To mark the occasion we also produced a publication. Contributions to that showed that the Probation Service in 1974 was very different.

Probably the biggest difference has been in the staff that we employ. In 1974 it was very much a white organisation with few members of staff from ethnic minorities and few from other faith communities.

At that time the service failed to represent the multi-cultural nature of society. That situation changed only slowly during the 1980's but in the last 10 years we have more than doubled the number of ethnic minority staff in our organisation. Now some 18% of our workforce are black and Asian, and we have a wide range of faiths and people without a religious faith, in our organisation.

The relationship between values, views of right and wrong, about punishment and mercy are central to many different faiths. Indeed the early history of the modern Probation Service dates back to the late 19th century with the establishment of Police Court Missionaries.

This role, often taken by local ministers of religion, was based on a notion of rescuing criminals from a cycle of crime, frequently the product of alcohol abuse, and the resultant sentences of imprisonment. It had parallels with the growth of the Salvation Army and the temperance movement.

After the Probation service was established on a legal footing by Acts of Parliament in the early 20th century, it was still the case that many Probation Officers were also part-time or ex-ministers of religion.

Although the Probation Service has been a professional organisation for many years, the strong thread of faith based motivation for at least an initial interest in this area of work still exists amongst some staff.

The Probation Service now has a wide range of functions and one that has grown particularly in the last 25 years has been community service. Beneficiaries of the work done by community service offenders are frequently put in touch with the scheme through local temples and places of worship.

For example the Wolverhampton Community Service Unit has worked in the past year with; Bradley Methodist Church, at the Jewish Cemetery, with Ek Niwas (One Home), the Asian Evangelical Church and with the Wolverhampton Mosque on Waterloo Road.

Of equal importance to the Probation Service is to ensure that work tasks allocated to people on community service or the times of appointments and group work programmes for people on probation do not conflict with the requirements of people's religion.

This is a process of continual learning and one that has been helped over the years by links to groups such as the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group.

The "think local - act global" event in 1997 drew support from the Probation Service, and was publicised in our staff magazine, as an initiative which successfully brought people together to enjoy themselves, to learn and to share.

Who could want for more than that!

Keith Young  
West Midlands Probation Service.



### Targeted Resources.

I have had the advantage over the other contributors to this volume, in that I had a chance to read what they wrote before finalising my contribution. That enjoyable reading saved me repeating some of the helpful things they have contributed.

I am conscious of the twenty-five years of hard work and discovery that is being celebrated in our Silver Jubilee. Beyond what WIFG did in its own name, the Inter-Faith Group has contributed to the practical thinking and policies of many other bodies in Wolverhampton and enhanced their effectiveness.

There are with us for the celebration just a few of those members who have been with us since the beginning, and it is our intention to honour them by acknowledging their foresight and vision. Listening to their stories convinces me that we have come a long way in the last twenty-five years.

Three changes (among many) that I see are these:

Firstly, we have grown in mutual trust as people who are *different*. We don't have to insist that 'inside you are really the same as me, your faith is the same as mine, it only looks different from the outside'.

Secondly, we have come to honour and respect the differences, as *something that binds us together*. The cement between bricks in a building holds them apart, as well as holding them together.

Thirdly, we are moving on from general creation of respect and harmony, on to *targeted programmes*. The Development Plan we have now adopted sharpens the focal points of our activities. Our aim is to become a really effective RESOURCE CENTRE for R.E., as well as for more general enquiries about different faiths in town.

Ivy Cutridge has written her own message in this 'booklet'.

I want to pay tribute to the way she held the group together in many a difficult moment. The confidence we have in mutual relationships is due in part to her mothering the whole group, never mind nurturing and encouraging individual members. What will consolidate our belonging is the focused programmes now included in our Development Plan.

New members of the Board bring fresh energy and perspectives.

A very active Funding Group has in hand a number of grant applications. The office will be decorated and refurbished by a Single Regeneration Budget Grant from the Council. Funds for ordinary running and rent are harder to come by.

I hope you will enjoy the brighter welcome from the surrounding of the office, in the very near future. The personal welcome is always there.

The Jewish Community in Wolverhampton has a distinguished record, and were among the founder members of the group.

The Synagogue in Fryer Street is now closed and up for sale.

There is a suggestion that the Council might buy it, and give it for use by the Inter-Faith Group, and we are exploring how that might happen.

With that building we could become a very effective resource centre for Multi-Faith Religious Education.

Jim McManus  
Hon. Secretary.

### Wolverhampton Inter-Faith - 25 Years.

It is a privilege to be invited to take part in the celebrations of Wolverhampton's Inter-Faith Group.

On such occasions one may reflect upon achievements or reminisce. For my part I prefer to look to the future and comment on a couple of matters which seem to me to require resolution before the 50th Anniversary is observed.

During recent years Britain's multi religious nature has been recognised increasingly. Many TV presenters and reporters testify to it daily. TV and radio programmes and articles in journals enhance this awareness. Promenade concerts usually include music from the subcontinent. The Prince of Wales, the Bishop of London, the Chief Rabbi, and political representatives affirmed that we are a multifaith society and spoke of the contribution of Sikhs to the nation's life, and the need for their values to be shared with the rest of us when they spoke at the Vaisakhi 300 gathering at the Royal Albert Hall last April.

In two respects, however, there has been no movement and it will not be correct to speak of Britain as genuinely multi-religious until these have been dealt with positively. I refer to the school curriculum and the participation of faiths other than Christian in national acts of worship.

Religious Education, it is well known is multifaith by act of parliament. The 1988 Education Act required agreed syllabuses to "reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking into account the teaching and practice of other principal religions represented in the country" (Section 8 (3)).

However, there is no requirement for pupils to read the short stories of R K Narayan or learn about Islamic art or scientific achievement. Helping children discover their world heritage is not something that schools need be concerned about.

Some people may begin to find out about it as I did aged 32, but they are likely to be the few.

Most schools will not help young Muslims to develop self esteem or encourage their peers to respect Islamic cultures.

White pupils, for the sake of a better phrase, will continue to despise those with brown or black skins, who in turn will not learn to be proud of their rich heritage. The world of 1945, ever receding, still seems to dominate British education. And even references to that are selective.

The 50th anniversaries of VE and VJ Day ignored the contribution of the two and a half million strong Indian army, the largest voluntary army in world history. They were at Dunkirk, they held back Rommel in the Western desert and they stemmed the Japanese advance from Burma into the subcontinent. Yet it was only this spring that most watchers of BBC2 learned of their exploits and the 28 VC's which they won!

I am fully aware of the difficulties which are said to attend inter religious worship. I did not sit on an Anglican Board of Mission Committee which considered it for what seemed a decade without hearing them many times over. In fact I suggested that the final document might be scrapped and trees saved. "Multifaith worship can damage your (spiritual) health!" might do instead! I have also been present at discussions on the issue in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey.

My concern, however, is with justice. The act of worship from Llandaff Cathedral, just before the Welsh Assembly formally came into being, mentioned the fact that Wales was a multifaith society many times but when it came down to reality only Christian denominations, perhaps as many as a dozen of them, were heard! In the days of my childhood there was a saying "Children might be seen but not heard". So it is to be apparently with faiths other than Christian in Wales.

The service in St. Giles Cathedral to mark the opening of the Scottish Parliament had nothing to say about other faiths so no expectations were raised and dashed.

Theology is dead if it cannot respond to reality. Jesus, (and I speak as a Christian), does not need such thinkers to defend him. What is true will survive and triumph and be strengthened by challenge.

What will happen when a new monarch is enthroned? If Britain really is the home of the two and a half million Jews, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs it must recognise their right as much as that of Christians to speak, to pray for their nation and its ruler in public.

If the Britain of the next fifty years cannot become a country where the faiths of other men and women are honoured as much as my own it will have no right to call itself the United Kingdom. The phrase used to relate to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In the future it must stand for the more important unity of faiths in a country where each of us can sit under their own vine and fig tree, and none shall make us afraid. That vision requires justice, not meaningless words.

Hang in there my friends of other faiths. The invitation will come, and when it does, please be more gracious in accepting it than the Christian defenders of the faith who have kept you waiting.

Dr. W. Owen Cole.  
Chichester University College.

### Whose History?

When I was first asked to contribute an article to this commemorative booklet I found the task a daunting one.

This may seem a strange response coming from a politician.

The whole species are renowned for being able to offer instant opinions on just about any topic that comes our way.

However, a contribution which celebrates 25 years of Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group must do justice to that achievement. So I decided to speak from personal experience, which means that on this occasion a politician knows what she is talking about.

When I looked at the six themes from which I could choose my article, the one which jumped out of the page at me was Education.

For many years we have all argued that education is the key to developing an understanding of the different cultures which live in our town. Out of knowledge comes understanding.

But the main reason why the theme of Education caught my eye was because of an experience I had about 12 years ago as a parent.

My husband John and I were at the stage of choosing a secondary school for our son to go to, and being conscientious parents we decided to look at about half a dozen schools on our side of town.

We dutifully went to all the open evening and asked what we thought were all the right questions.

At one school we visited we found ourselves in conversation with the head of the History Department and noticing the posters around the classroom wall depicting Roman occupation, Viking invasion, and wars around the world, we asked the teacher whose history was taught, bearing in mind the multi-cultural nature of the school students. (This was before the days of the National Curriculum.)

### The Outcome of One Visit.

The teacher did not totally understand our question and so we gave an example of what we meant - the British Empire.

Was the British Empire taught from a different perspective than a generation ago? Or perhaps more appropriately, was the history of the British Empire taught from several different perspectives?

The answer disappointed us, mainly because it did not seem to recognise that a shared experience could have different interpretations.

This happened over decade ago, and I know that if a parent asked that question today of a history teacher in Wolverhampton he/she would get a different answer.

One of the reasons for this is because of the work of the Inter-Faith Group, which seeks to find common ground between all faiths and is based on the important premise that there is more to bind us than divide us.

In seeking to promote this thought, we need to aim for the highest common denominator - not the lowest. This is what Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group has always sought to achieve, and I hope that it has another 25 successful years ahead of it.

Jenny Jones MP  
Wolverhampton South-West  
House of Commons.

My interest in religions, other than my own, was rekindled when I attended a part-time course for teachers, over two terms, in R.E.

As part of this course, a group of us spent a day visiting various places of worship in and around Birmingham, these included a Muslim Mosque, a Sikh Temple and a Hindu Mandir.

This visit highlighted to me, that although it is important to talk about, study and research different religions in the classroom, they only actually come to life and have meaning when the places of worship and the people within them, are experienced first hand.

To immerse oneself, just for a short while, in the religious and cultural world of others, is not only intriguing but intrinsic to the encouragement of learning, understanding and tolerance of others.

This is an issue very close to my heart and something that through my teaching, I endeavour to pass on to my children - ignorance is threatening, autonomy lonely, but to share experiences and faiths can only benefit and allay fear and superstitions.

This then, is where the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group has proved to be such an asset in the education of children.

For the Shri Krishan Mandir, the Sikh Temples and the Mosques to open their doors to us and for W.I.F.G. to give generously of their time, is undoubtedly not only necessary to aid our children's education, but it also brings their studies to life.

Our visits have always been enjoyed and I feel glad to be classed as a friend of the group

When I first met Dr. Bando outside the Hindu Mandir, I knew I was going to bring new experiences and new people to the children, but what I was not prepared for and could never have imagined, was that I myself would learn so much and receive such hospitality.

### Under the Bodhi Tree with the Dalai Lama.

For this to continue, through your support, has been wonderful. I have received letters of support and information to aid the curriculum, some that I asked for and some that I did not.

I will also always be grateful that Dr. Bando was willing to loan me the very precious video of his son's Sacred Thread Ceremony. All of these things have helped to equip me as a better teacher of R.E. and I thank Dr. Bando and the Group sincerely.

In conclusion then, Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group has proved itself and provides a great service to the education of our future generations.

I wish the Group another 25 years of success and I am grateful for their existence.

Thank You

Diane Smith  
Teacher.  
Webb Heath First School  
Redditch

In the winter sun, a leaf fell from high up among the branches of the sacred Bodhi Tree and fluttered down into the very lap of the Dalai Lama. It was the kind of symbol the cinema would have used: the spiritual head of Tibetan Buddhism, sitting on the ground hallowed by the Buddha himself nearly two and a half millennia ago, and the falling leaf establishing a connection between them. A Christian might have thought of the voice from heaven as the dove descended on Jesus at his baptism. This is my beloved Son; listen to him! This enormous tree is magnificent in its own right. But its history marks it out as something without equal. For here, according to tradition, the Buddha sat and, resolving not to rise until he attained to the supreme knowledge, and eventually reached enlightenment.

That was a long time ago and no mortal tree would have lived from then until now. This tree is described as the fifth generation of the original Bodhi tree which gave shade to the Buddha - each new sapling created from its senescent forebear.

History and tradition come together with modern devotion to create a place that must move the most cynical heart. I believe in pilgrimage to sacred places, not because there is any magic or gnostic knowledge to be found thereby, but rather because the ancient spiritual traditions of the world are all anchored to the earth in this same way. Bodhgaya, the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, just like Jerusalem for Christians or Varanasi for Hindus, is special because the devotion of generations gives us a direct connection to the founding events of our religious cultures.

Perhaps it is natural for a Christian community to feel a strong affinity for the meditative traditions in other faiths, and particularly in the faiths of Indian origin. Strong links have been built up with some of these other traditions, with the gateway to religious dialogue being through the shared practice of meditation.

In 1994, His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) Community's John Main Seminar, a concentrated period of teaching and meditation. What was perhaps unique about this occasion was that the Dalai Lama used the opportunity to comment on key passages of the New Testament.

To hear how the Christian gospel texts came across to this holiest of Buddhist leaders was a remarkable experience for the Christians who took part. The Good Heart Seminars, as they were called, were subsequently published as a book with the same name and have reached a wide audience.

This pilgrimage of Christians, to meet the Dalai Lama again, grew out of that first encounter. Called the Way of Peace Pilgrimage, it is the first of a three part initiative of mutual understanding and peace-making. A journey like this has to make spiritual as well as geographical sense.

It has to work from a travel point of view, but it also has to have a spiritual coherence with one day leading naturally to the next - without hiatus or incongruity.

We were challenged at every stage. We planned a journey including visits to Christian and Hindu ashrams and pilgrimage centres in South India, and a dawn observance on the sacred river Ganges at Varanasi. The climax of the journey was to be the three days of meetings with His Holiness at Bodhgaya.

I sat under the Bodhi Tree within a few feet of His Holiness and watched this first leaf fall into his lap. The Dalai Lama picked it up with a delighted laugh and passed it to Fr. Laurence. 'For you' he said. Then we listened to Fr. Laurence reading the Beatitudes and watched the Dalai Lama's head bow lower at each blessing, the compassion of Jesus and of the Buddha indistinguishable.

**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.  
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness,  
for they will be filled.  
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.  
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.  
Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.**

And then, over the next three days the Dalai Lama answered our questions and asked his own and we talked about compassion in action and how to be content, about inner stillness, salvation and enlightenment. And every day we meditated together under this incomparable tree. And, as we did so, the desire that all beings should be happy was nurtured and strengthened as we saw how Jesus and the Buddha - and their disciples in the present day - are motivated to remove suffering.

Rev. Kenneth Wilson  
Soul of India Tours.

### God's Blessing and Congratulations to the W.I.F.G.

It is with pleasure that these words are penned for your **Commemorative Silver Jubilee Booklet** by some members of the **Association of Women Executives (A.W.E.)**

The membership of the association is for women actively engaged in responsible positions in all forms of business and other professions. Two of its aims are "to keep abreast of world affairs" and "to meet regularly on a social basis" It is a result of these two aims that the association made contact with the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group.

Our first successful visit, in 1995, was to the Nanaksar Thath Sikh Temple and in 1998, equally successful, to the Shree Krishan Mandir.

Visitors to these places of worship cannot fail to be impressed by the welcome and hospitality received. The unique way in which the love of God through humanity is emphasised in a universal way is sincerely portrayed. Understanding and tolerance are promoted and encouraged and they cause even the non-religious amongst the group to question themselves.

The overwhelming effect after a visit is one of peace and goodwill to all people.

Mavis Downes.

Property Manager and Member of A.W.E. on Visions for the Future.

Looking back into history, we find that a number of wars and disputes between countries have concerned religious beliefs.

As far ago as the eleventh and twelfth centuries we had the Crusades, where the Christians set out to capture Jerusalem from the Saracens so that pilgrimages could take place to the Holy places. In more recent times we have had to witness the dispute between Hindus and Muslims in India, the suppression of the Orthodox Church in Communist Russia, the persecution of the Jews in Hitler's Germany and the conflict in Northern Ireland between Catholics and Protestants.

All faiths and religions worship a supreme being by whatever name they wish to call them - God, Brahman, Buddha, Allah, Jehovah etc. and most creeds set out a way of life for their people to follow.

It is my hope for the future that everyone will come to understand and respect everyone else's way of life and worship, and the good work carried out by the Inter-Faith group helps to promote this. Perhaps in years to come we can look back into history and find that religious conflicts are no longer happening.

**Useful Quotes:**

*"Before they think of freedom they must be brave enough to love one another."*

(Mahatma Gandhi)

*"Non-violence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our being"*

(Mahatma Gandhi)

Judith Tizzard. Voluntary Worker writes on Experiences.

Those of us living in the large conurbation of the west Midlands are in an area of many faiths and cultures. For us all to live in harmony with each other and understand, our two visits have been so helpful. The welcome at the Sikh Gurdwara and the Hindu Mandir were so warm and friendly.

To visit the buildings and take part in the devotions showed the warmth of the community and the extensive work carried out in the wider area.

Adrienne Hall.

Religious Education Co-ordinator, writes on Religion/Faith.

I have brought approximately 500 children from Aston Fields Middle School, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire to visit places of worship in Wolverhampton in the last five years.

I strongly believe it is through our young people that tolerance and understanding of others will develop and have the most meaningful impact.

It is the work of the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group that provides the vehicle to achieve this. It is the response and reactions of one of these children that so simply sums up the good work of W.I.F.G.

Louise Sutton. Pupil, aged 12, writes:

There are many religions in the World. They all started in different times and in different places. Years ago each part of the world had its own religion and almost everyone in that area would follow the same religion. But in modern times people travel much more than they used to, so you can meet the members of most religions in every country.

Members of all religions have special places where they gather together as a family of believers, usually these are special buildings, people spend time and money making them look attractive.

The main religions of the world may appear to be very different but they have much in common.

The way of life they follow, the family atmosphere and the laws followed in their daily work are important as a way to ensure people lead considerate lives.

It is hoped that people who believe in God will know what is right from wrong as they live by His standards.

In conclusion, as we move towards the Millennium may the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group continue to show to us the immense love of God, which is all embracing, and may all people live in **Peace and Harmony**.

Adrienne Hall  
on behalf of A.W.E.

O God - "I Have Need of Thee"

(A Hindu perspective)

O my Lord! You are the centre of my life  
Come to me, 'I have need of Thee'  
I would forsake my earthly attachments  
So that life of 'spirit' in me can usher in me.

In the mirror of my lonely heart  
Thy image only I long to meet,  
I shall give up all my ego and 'I'  
And strive to reach Thy lotus feet.

I know I have to lose 'myself' for sake of Thee  
with prayer on lips, and light from Thy face,  
My heart is wide open for you in glee  
to receive the gift of Thy loving 'grace'.

Bless me, I don't forget Thee even for a moment  
pray, I should always love and serve Thee.  
In all my long journeys from birth to birth  
Thy love should never be lost to me.

In the midst of all my thought, work and deed  
I surrender myself totally to Thee,  
Humbly do I bow and sing Thy song  
And receive your blessings, never to go wrong.

My tranquil soul is but Thy gleaming part  
O God, my beloved, my light and darling,  
Such prolonged separation breaketh my heart  
in Thy mercy, come to me, "I have need of Thee".

Dr. D. Bandopadhyay.  
Development Officer.



### Are We Thinking Big Enough???

One "Inter-Faith" Christian ponders WIFG's Silver Jubilee and the Millennium.

Nelson Mandela, in his inaugural speech in 1994, said:

"Our deepest fear  
is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear  
is that we are powerful beyond measure.  
It is our light, not our darkness  
that most frightens us.  
We ask ourselves, who am I  
to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?  
Actually, who are you not to be?  
  
You are a child of God,  
your playing small does not serve the world.  
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking  
so that other people won't feel insecure about you.

We were born to make manifest  
the Glory of God within us.  
It is not just in some of us; it's in everyone.  
And as we let our own light shine,  
We unconsciously give other people  
permission to do the same.  
As we are liberated from our own fear,  
our presence automatically liberates others."

At the inaugural meeting of IFNET ( the Inter-Faith Network U.K.) in 1987, leaders of all the major faith communities in the U.K. met to look together at a common future. Hassan Askari commented:

"Perhaps only in Britain, and only at this moment in history, could such a meeting as this be taking place."

One of the earliest pioneers of that historic meeting was in Wolverhampton when the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group (WIFG) was formed, in weakness, with uncertainty, but with VISION.

The Millennium marks (roughly) 2,000 years of Christianity, with AD (anno domini - year of the Lord) as its symbol. Millennium is also C.E., the 'Common Era' that has been adopted for practical convenience by the 'united world community'. For the 'man/woman in the street', and the commercial world, it is an excuse for an almighty binge, and vast expenditure.

As a man of faith, I hope we will enjoy the party - not be 'holier than thou' over celebration. This wonderful world, and its wonderful human achievements are meant to be enjoyed and celebrated.

I hope that all humans will discover at a deeper level our joint tenancy, with 'all sentient beings', and our physical environment, of planet earth; and rediscover the mystery of space - time, and of life, in which we are set. I hope that Christians, celebrating JESUS' 2,000th birthday will re-dedicate themselves to Justice and Peace, Shanti, Shalom, Islam, remembering the 'angels' song' at JESUS' birth:

Glory to God in the highest

And peace to his people on earth.

And are any group of people not HIS - GOD's people?

Many Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, friends (and many western secular agnostic/humanists) recognise that Millennium is firstly a Christian celebration. They are hoping that Christians will celebrate it by taking the lead in drawing together people of all faiths and none in a Millennium pledge:

Rejoice together in GOD's world, rejecting nobody

Recognise our many past mistakes/disasters and repent

Commit ourselves to building a world as it is MEANT TO BE

That's good, high sounding language. WHAT'S THE COST?

Christians say that JESUS got himself crucified trying to do just that. He ran foul of established religion, imperial power and the mob. Only GOD was on his side, and he felt deserted even by GOD. Other faiths tell some similar stories. So, if our task is a bit daunting, we are in good company. Christians say JESUS rose again. Has that meaning for those of other faiths or none?

Rev'd. Tim Fyffe.

### Meeting as Friends - Into The New Millennium

I am sure the we all have experiences of communication or the lack of it, and how meeting and forming a basis for dialogue through friendship helps to promote greater understanding and trust (and conversely, how a lack of dialogue leads to the erosion of the qualities of a peaceful society).

All over the world, there are walls littered throughout the very fabric of society - high walls built upon half-truths and false perceptions about what and who might be on the other side. A lot of the time, the media makes use of these sweeping generalities, assumptions and ignorant guesses, because creating a stereotype, and feeding on peoples' fears sells newspapers and people believe what they read.

The problems start in society when the walls are too high to see over, when there is no meeting, when there is created within one's own cliquey cultural/religious enclave, a view of the world that is solely based upon what the papers say, or what we heard someone say - second or third hand about what is "out there". When this happens, society is in greater danger than it realises.

The Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group has now spent twenty five years challenging these barriers that have stood in Wolverhampton, and in so doing, has contributed towards the positive community ethos that exists in the town today - we have achieved some good things for the benefit of many. We have discovered that meeting is good and dialogue through friendship and trust can penetrate even the sensitive aspects of differences in faith (the biggest barrier of them all). Friendships and trusting relationships form the surest bases for meaningful dialogue.

I think we can all see the need for a true meeting of faith, culture and tradition - that is open and transparent - a sharing of what makes us tick as faithful people. Our challenge is not so much in our midst - amongst we interested few who already appreciate the need for dialogue and relationship. It is rather to the majority who remain crouched behind walls that needn't be there at all.

As we approach the new Millennium together, there is a great opportunity before us, to invite ALL people in Wolverhampton to seek ways in which they can meet and make friends with people on the other sides of local walls - to discover a God-given humanity common to all - to learn to understand each other better. As WIFG, we are launching in 2000 a project that will enable just that to happen. The "Meeting in the Millennium" Project (The MIM Project) will be coming to a worshipping community near you!

This is the best way to take forward the wonderful legacy of 25 years of what WIFG has achieved, into the next phase of this world's history, where we can meet as friends and walk into a hopeful future together.

*The Revd. David Cooper  
Liaison Officer of WIFG and Interfaith Officer of the Diocese of Lichfield.*

### A Personal Vision for the Future

In our Silver Jubilee Celebration we should be thinking about the advent of the new millennium, which is basically a Christian event marking 2000 years of the birth of Jesus Christ. We should be applying ways and means of making it relevant, meaningful and important to the diverse communities in the city (hopefully, it will be a city by then) of Wolverhampton.

You may well ask "what has that got to do with us?" Well, the events of history, quite honestly, have very often made for sobering reading which cannot give a good testimony to human achievements. In fact, every single civilised and caring individual should feel rather ashamed of our record of achievements during the past millennium. However, being ashamed and feeling guilty for the action of others will achieve very little else. What is required is action for change for a better world for all, irrespective of their religious affiliations and ethnic origins.

The Inter-Faith Meeting in the Millennium (MIM) project is an attempt at the inclusive approach and it is right and proper that the initiative should have and has, come from the Inter-Faith Group which has been striving for the past 25 years to bring about unity in diversity - creating community understanding and relationships and thereby a sense of belonging to this wonderful Metropolitan Borough.

As an originator of the Inter-Faith dialogue, both professionally and socially, during the last 36 years in Britain, 30 years in Wolverhampton - I feel extremely enthusiastic about the future role of the Inter-Faith Group which, needless to say, has worked extremely hard since its inception for justice and fairness in the Borough.

Inter-Faith dialogue has just started to be understood and more widely accepted as the most important means by which inter-racial and inter-religious understanding and harmony for co-existence in Wolverhampton, nay in the whole world, can be created.

The new millennium brings us an ideal opportunity for a fresh start to a new world order for all to work for peace, harmony and understanding.

I should like to take this opportunity to whole-heartedly congratulate the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group for its pioneering and visionary bridge building work over the past 25 years. The Group's work was recognised by 10 Downing Street some three years ago through the award of an MBE to its first secretary, Mrs Ivy Gutridge, who, of course, thoroughly deserved the honour. A great deal has been achieved by the Group for a better Wolverhampton and a better Britain for all during the past 25 years, but the work is not finished yet. There is a lot more that needs to be done, and the Group is the most appropriate and best suited body to help facilitate it.

The Group is looked up to for advice, both locally and nationally, by statutory as well as voluntary organisations, on sensitive issues; its resources - such as the Directory of Places of Worship in Wolverhampton, and the photographs, are referred to and highly valued by all who come across them; its educational visits and annual pilgrimage to places of worship are cherished in the memories of those who have participated in them.

Inter-Faith dialogue is not a new religion, nor is it an attempt to dilute any one's faith or to convert to another faith. It is simply to create opportunities to understand one's own faith better and to reflect on what it means to belong to a faith and how it helps one to relate to people who belong to faiths other than one's own.

Over the past 25 years, the Inter-Faith Group has been helping us all in a very practical way to live in harmony and peace with one another without giving up our religious beliefs or faiths. It has also been helping us to find ways of accepting, understanding and respecting one another, which requires courage of conviction and a deeper understanding of our own faith.

## Two Images and a Vision!

In this connection, I should like to bring in an anecdote to illustrate what I am trying to convey.

Nearly 30 years ago, the Bishop of Lichfield invited a large number of people - mostly Christians, to a conference in the Cathedral on "What can the Church do to create a multi-cultural Society?"

As I was one of very few non-Christians invited to attend, I was afforded the opportunity to make a brief comment or ask one or two questions. I remember very vividly what I said at the time. I stood up and there was complete silence. I took courage and said "Bishop, the answer is very simple to me. All you have to do is to turn your congregation into Christians. And I shall say the same thing to the Muslims, the Jews, the Hindus, the Sikhs, the Buddhists and all other faiths. A truly religious person must love and treat every human being as a brother or a sister".

I still believe what I said then.

This is what I feel the Inter-Faith Group has been trying to achieve. And this work must continue into the next Millennium.

Harun Rashid  
Vice-President  
July 1999.

Since I first came to the Midlands in 1983 I have been a member of the Inter-Faith Group representing Christian Aid. I have many memories.

Let me share two images and a vision.

1. Prayers for Peace on a cold January afternoon in St Peter's. The church is warmed by the crowd of people filling the seats. As the service goes on I am struck by the differences between us - different languages, music, clothes, symbols, holy books, prayers. I thank God that in the midst of this rich diversity we are united by at least one thing - our shared longing for peace.

2. A sunny Saturday morning in Queen Square in May last year. Throughout the morning, representatives of different faith communities emerged through the busy crowds of shoppers and brought Jubilee 2000 petitions bearing many signatures demanding the cancellation of the unpayable debt of the world's poorest countries by the Millennium.

These were then taken to Birmingham where many people from Wolverhampton joined the great Human Chain to persuade the G8 leaders to take action to break the chains of debt. Once again, whatever our background, one thing united us - our common demand for justice.

3. When I think of the years ahead in the new Millennium I can't ignore words like these from the President of the Jubilee Afrika Campaign - "Debt is tearing down schools, clinics and hospitals and the effects are no less devastating than war." There can never be peace without justice. Yet, so many people feel powerless to change anything for the better, given the remoteness of political systems and the formidable power of corporate money.

### A City for the Millennium.

So my vision for the future, is one where we all feel empowered to make a difference by working together. Last year at Birmingham the G8 leaders weren't even going to discuss debt cancellation. But we put it on their agenda, and a year later at Cologne they've announced proposals to cancel \$100 billion of debt.

It's not yet enough to release real money to tackle poverty and provide proper health care and education. But the G8 meet again in July 2000 in Japan.

My prayer is that we have the determination, the anger, the imagination, the staying power to keep up the pressure on the decision makers to break the chains of debt and liberate a billion people from absolute poverty. And then let's go to work for the next billion, inspired by our success!

And may the faith communities be at the heart of this struggle, this pilgrimage, this work of love. May what we do now and how we are with each other show all the world that although we rejoice in our different traditions we proudly unite in our passion for justice and for peace.

Charles Worth  
Christian Aid.

The 25th Anniversary of Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group comes just after the closing date for the submission of bids for City Status to the Home Secretary, who will advise the Queen.

Our bid is in and being assessed.

My vision for the future is Wolverhampton the new City for the Millennium. The town, through its communities, continues to exercise the dignity and example of a city in all but name. To the people of Wolverhampton, City Status would be a recognition of their civic pride, harmony, ambition and loyalty.

Ours is an ancient and distinguished community with at least a thousand years of recorded urban history and well over a millennium of Christian worship on the same site.

Its stability as a place of worship has attracted many multi-cultural faiths that today worship alongside each other in harmony.

Its citizens are a resilient people who have fought back from the severe economic circumstances of the 1980's to face the future with confidence.

A future which is already being written, in the ground, as new projects take root and in the imaginations of civic leaders, businesses and the borough's young people.

We have one of the most vibrant multi-racial communities in the country, bringing together many international cultures to forge a future combining the best of all.

Wolverhampton is regularly chosen by Government to pioneer new directions and urban policy from education through to economic development and transport.

The people of Wolverhampton have made the town a significant centre for the administration of justice and for decision-making in business and public life.

The industry and enterprise of its people is reflected in a thriving shopping and service centre for more than half a million people with easily-accessed city standard facilities in sport, the arts and higher education.

Rather than creating a melting pot, we encourage our people to treasure their differences and celebrate their uniqueness, whilst living side by side with tolerance for all.

Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group is a fundamental pillar in sharing the wisdom, understanding and insights which flow from respect for each other.

City Status would, I believe, make a significant contribution to our vision to build a safe, confident and prosperous multi-cultural community.

It will come as no surprise that our submission to the Home Secretary was produced in a spirit of true partnership, with contributions from all sections of the community reflecting business, sports, the arts, education, the media, the voluntary sector and community leaders.

These are the strengths upon which we celebrate our past successes and upon which we face the future with confidence.

Derrick Anderson,  
Chief Executive and Policy Co-Ordinator  
Wolverhampton Metropolitan Borough Council.

## Visions for the Future

The Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group has done some wonderful work over the past twenty-five years. It is still much in demand to provide advice to Education Authorities, Police and Probation Services, Schools, Hospitals and many other enquirers. It has a name throughout the country for being one of the pioneers in this field.

The presence of different faith communities in the same town is a challenge to all of us. Each faith sincerely believes that it has received Divine Revelation - vital truths and teachings in which we bring up our children, and seek to share with others. Each faith community would probably feel more comfortable in a society where it had a monopoly! But God calls us to live together, and to find ways of understanding and respecting each other.

Without surrendering or compromising our own beliefs, we have to contribute them in a dialogue in which we listen and learn as well as teach. If God is indeed the creator of all life, we must expect to glimpse his face and hear his voice in every human tradition.

A multi-ethnic and multi-faith community is a society in search of a new identity. God is opening our hearts and minds to recognise one another as brothers and sisters, and to be prepared to change. This is a great challenge which requires all the resources of respect, tolerance, courage, love and forgiveness which our faiths offer us.

### Does WIFG itself need to change?

I am struck by the fact that the newer inter-faith movement in the Stoke-on-Trent area is called 'North Staffordshire Faiths in Friendship', and not an Inter-Faith Group. Is there perhaps a danger in the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group having become so well known that it is taken for granted?

A few people give devoted service, and our various faith communities - mosques, churches and temples - are grateful for what they do, and leave them to get on with it.

I think we need a greater sense of ownership of the movement by the faith communities themselves.

Only if our temples, mosques and churches themselves want to live in friendship will the movement gather strength and have a firm foundation for the future.

Previous attempts to encourage the faith communities to pay for the work of the Inter-Faith Group by regular subscriptions have so far failed. We rely on grants, and live 'hand to mouth'. This is a difficult challenge which I believe our faith communities must face - do they want the assistance and strength of a faiths in friendship movement or not?

#### Sharing our Differences.

A mark of deep friendship is that we are prepared to share differences as well as agreements. The Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Movement is mature enough to share some of the things that divide us in our beliefs and practices, as well as the things that unite us in the face of a secular world.

In the new millennium we are moving beyond the stage of visiting each other, exchanging messages of goodwill and uniting around common interests.

There can be a wrong emphasis on disagreements when they are used to divide us and sow mistrust. But there can also be a harmful avoidance of differences which means in fact that we are failing to listen and be challenged by the sincerely held beliefs of others.

In the millennium year a Conference is being arranged on the theme of 'conversion' in our various faiths. This will be an important step on the road of this deepening understanding. May the spirit and the wisdom of the living God guide us as we share together in this pilgrimage of faith.

Michael Wulfrun  
Bishop of Wolverhampton  
President of Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group

#### Visions for the Future.

Our vision for the future is very much in keeping with the Inter Faith Network's statement of purpose:

**"We are working towards a Britain in which people of different faiths can draw on their own spiritual heritage, with integrity, to help create a society rooted in shared values and characterised by mutual respect and understanding".**

We want our country to be one where people of different faiths have a greater understanding of each other's beliefs and ways of life and where the importance of faith in the lives many of its citizens is properly recognised.

Our vision is of a society characterised by openness but also by clarity and firmness of purpose, where there is active tolerance (not just a grudging acceptance that others are "different") and a willingness to see the point of view of other people without losing the strength of one's own belief.

A vision for the future is an open one.


We can see the broad shape of what we hope it will be like. For it to become a living reality will take the work of many people, and - to speak from the point of view of our own personal faith - the work of God.

Bringing about and deepening inter faith harmony will take the best efforts of all the faith communities: Baha'i; Buddhist; Christian; Hindu; Jain; Jewish; Muslim; Sikh; Zoroastrian and others. It will take the willingness of educators, people in all the employment sectors, local and national Government, and the wider public, to become more aware of this.

It is so vital to work to remove and prevent prejudice and discrimination based on religious belief and practice (and indeed all forms of prejudice and discrimination) and to find ways towards a new consciousness of being part of a United Kingdom characterised by a new, enriching and exciting diversity yet also by a clear continuity with the past.

Brian Pearce	-	Director
Harriet Crabtree	-	Deputy Director
Bhupinder Singh	-	Information Officer

The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom



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