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Chairman's Message

Is it just me or is time going faster? It certainly is racing away in our 40th anniversary year – we are already half-way through.

Wolverhampton Inter-Faith & Regeneration Network – nay our City – is like an extended family; although we all want the same things, we also have deep differences – in religion, in language, in culture. Nevertheless we live in a relaxed, peaceful and vibrant city. The harmony as well as the respect for the differences that we all enjoy is the result, largely, of the efforts of WIFRN over the last 40 years. However, this is not the time for complacency – we have a long way to go yet. We still experience a degree of unfairness and injustice in certain situations in the same way as squabbles and fallouts happen in families. Yet, like every happy family, we get on very well.

The legacy of Nelson Mandela, a 'large man' in every way, has been to expand human freedom and dignity. He was tolerant of everything but of intolerance, wrongdoing, injustice and unfairness. 'That is not right' is the simple phrase that underlay everything he did, everything he sacrificed for and everything he accomplished. Our goal has always been the same as that of Nelson Mandela, striving for greater justice and fairness. With your support, we have built many bridges and broken down many barriers but there remain many more to be built and broken for the vision of the pioneers of the inter-faith movement in our City to



remain focussed and sustained. The inter-faith network has something for all of us – a way to let us do more and be more. We need to come together in a spirit of friendship, tolerance, patience and mutual respect in order to realise how much we have in common. Each of us needs to try to understand the other's point of view and way of life. If we fail to do this, building bridges will be more difficult.

We have come a long way, as will be seen from the extracts on the following pages from the 40th Anniversary booklet 'Building Bridges not walls' written by our vice-President Sehdev Bismal. We have established ourselves as a highly credible and respected organisation, so much so that the City's incoming Mayor, Councillor Mike Heap, has made WIFRN one of his three chosen charities for his year in office – a great honour for us and a great and much-needed financial support.

(continued on page 3)

Building Bridges, not Walls

1974 was a turbulent year in UK history. It was scarred by the three-day week, two General Elections, one disruptive change of government and a state of emergency in Northern Ireland. The Provisional IRA began its bombing campaign of the British mainland. Wolverhampton too was changing appearance. There were many new communities arriving here and becoming more and more visible in its neighbourhoods. The air in town carried a whiff of tension from time to time. This was the year when the Wolverhampton Interfaith Group was born.

Wolverhampton now is a thriving, vibrant multicultural city with a wide range of ethnicities and faiths living in harmony. Despite its undeserved poor media image, the city is sometimes held up as a good example of community cohesion. It is a city where the different traditions and mores of residents originating from other countries are not only tolerated and accepted but also given acknowledgement as contributing to the richness of the city's cultural life.

It was not always like that. Only a few decades ago, it seemed to be a very different place. Migration from Commonwealth countries was creating ripples in the community. Inevitably, there were some people who were sceptical, and to some extent albeit unwittingly, hostile to the newcomers in their midst although, thankfully, they were not in the majority. Misconceptions about their cultural norms, religious beliefs and their moral compass rightly plagued their minds. Besides it was the sheer number of migrants that fuelled their anxieties.

There were no significant political initiatives on the horizon for bringing communities together or for combating festering misunderstandings and prejudices. It was inevitable for the newcomers to gravitate towards their own communities and not to have any meaningful social relationship with the indigenous population. Furthermore, the pronouncements by the local MP stoked the fire of suspicion and sometimes resulted in behaviour that turned equality considerations to cinders.

However, a meeting on 10 February 1974 changed the landscape of community relations bit by bit, incrementally, but surely. A number of people with a hunger for peace and understanding gathered together in All Saints Church hall to listen to Professor John Hick of Birmingham University, who argued that much of the racism witnessed in society at that time stemmed from ignorance of



other people's faiths, beliefs and life-styles. The high walls of ignorance that people of all hues had built around them did not let any tolerance or respect for others through.

A decision was taken to meet again in May and to have one meeting a month. That signalled the start of an exciting project, which in later years was to have a very positive impact on community relations in Wolverhampton. The project was named as the Wolverhampton Interfaith Group. Only Leicester can claim to have a similar group in place prior to that momentous decision. Wolverhampton was blazing the trail for interfaith work in the country.

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It was not an easy ride by any means. There were many people who had reservations or even objections to having an organisation where people of different faiths could talk together or work together without any dilution of their

individual faith. Some people felt that it might entail compromising their own beliefs whereas others felt that conversion to Christianity was the hidden agenda. As they started meeting together at monthly intervals, those involved became convinced that almost all religions promote peaceful co-existence and kindness to one's neighbour.

The Hindu concept that the entire world is but one family lays great emphasis on the unity of all religions. In Islam, the formula for social peace, harmony and interfaith dialogue is based on peaceful co-existence. Similarly, Sikhism actively promotes love for all humanity and the planet. We could say the same thing about Buddhism, a religion that teaches people to 'live and let live'. Christians aspire to lead a life fit for Jesus' commandment to love their neighbour.

The seeds sown by the pioneers in 1974 blossomed and many new, exciting developments happened as the Wolverhampton Interfaith Group, under different names, made its contribution to peace and harmony in the City. One noteworthy example is the first Youth-Faith conference in collaboration with the Wolverhampton Education Authority which was held in 1985. Most of the organization was done by a group of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian students from local schools. About 120 people of all ages attended this successful conference highlighting the need for multi-faith, multicultural education. Organizing a conference on a diverse range of community issues has since become a feature of the annual

programme of interfaith events.

Many of the events initiated by the Interfaith Group in those early years are still going strong. These include Prayers for Peace, seminars and lunchtime meetings on themes of Peace and mutual understanding, pilgrimages to well-known places of worship, working with schools, participating in festivals of different faiths, producing literature to promote interfaith dialogue, establishing and contributing to chaplaincy at New Cross Hospital and raising its voice against religious discrimination.

The Interfaith Group has worked under different names but the key driver has always been its avowed aim to bring different faith communities together, to dispel misconceptions and to garner a bit of light to penetrate the darkness of ignorance.

Committed people have worked hard to realize the dreams of hope that the pioneers of the Wolverhampton Interfaith Group once had back in 1974. They have significant achievements to sustain their belief in the central role of their group in bringing people of different faiths together. It is a mammoth task that looked impossible decades ago but the continued peace and understanding between communities in the city today makes them even more resolute in their commitment.

Sehdev Bismal

(An extract from Sehdev Bismal's special 40th Anniversary Booklet which is about to be published and will be available free to members)

(Chairman's Message continued...)

I wish to thank him most warmly for this. May other organisations and individuals be inspired to come forward with their own financial, moral and practical support.

As an extended family, we need to be more active and vibrant, with an inclusive age range. How else can we ensure our survival and the continuance of bridge-building? As John Howard, one of our vice-chairs, stresses in his vision for 10 years hence on page 4, the infusion of fresh blood and young people will energise us all, bringing new beginnings, new crops and a bumper harvest of ideas for the future.

Dr. Harun Rashid, Chairman

Awards for our vice-President and our Chairman

Congratulations to Sehdev Bismal and Harun Rashid, who have both been awarded an Outstanding Citizen Award by the outgoing Mayor.



Welcome to Wolverhampton City's new Mayor

Councillor Mike Heap, a Roman Catholic, is the newly-appointed Mayor of Wolverhampton. We are very pleased and grateful that he has selected WIFRN as one of his three charities for the year; he and Frances his wife were amongst those attending our President Bishop Clive's Garden Party on June 14th. (see page 8)

Interfaith 10 years on

It has been said that predicting organisations over ten years is rather like forecasting the weather over a similar period. The best that can be said is that it will be changeable! However, there seem to me to be a number of areas where we might set down a vision that we might work towards:

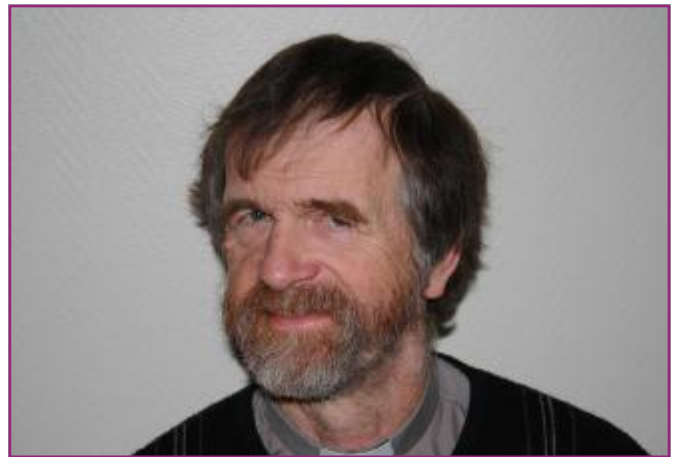
- Younger involvement
- Having the capacity to represent the faith groups of Wolverhampton
- Offer wider understanding of what it is to be a person of faith, and of the diversity that exists in world faiths represented in Wolverhampton.
- Being a part of making Wolverhampton a good place to live and/or work.

Younger involvement

The age profile of WIFRN leaves a lot to be desired! It is perhaps understandable that people coming new to their faith don't immediately get engaged in interfaith work. There is a need to have some confidence in your own faith before getting to know others. However at present we don't have any (as far as I know) Board members in their 20's or 30's, (dangerous thing to say if I have misjudged anyone I do apologise)! I am not sure why we have so few, perhaps some research needs to be undertaken into this area.

Having the capacity to represent the faith groups of Wolverhampton

My experience of being one of the Church Leaders in Wolverhampton is that the absence of a meeting for Faith Leaders is a serious omission in the work of WIFRN. There are difficulties in achieving this.



The Christian Church has so many branches to it there needs to be agreement upon who would be a part of it. I suspect we would need the agreement to have one representing Pentecostal Churches, One the Free Churches (including R.C.) and one Anglican. How we would achieve representation of the various Mosques, and Temples - is also hard to imagine, however the benefits of having a group who could speak with authority for the Faiths of Wolverhampton would be worth the difficulty in achieving it. There would also be benefits simply in the leaders of the faiths knowing each other, which at present they do not.

Offer wider understanding of what it is to be a person of faith, and of the diversity that exists in world faiths represented in Wolverhampton.

This is an area of work that we are already involved in. Mike's work in schools and John's work, before he left, with organisations – such as Wolverhampton Homes - has all demonstrated that there is a need for information and education for schools, businesses, charities and public bodies. This could, if organised appropriately, be a source not only of meeting need, but also of income generation for WIFRN, as many organisations would willingly pay for quality work in this area.

Being a part of making Wolverhampton a good place to live and/or work.

I like Wolverhampton as a City. However its reputation across the UK is not good. Alone we cannot do very much to change others' perceptions but the challenge of creating a lively diverse city where people get on well with each other – is a challenge that is a part of our objectives. City of Sanctuary, lively interfaith encounters, imaginative presentations of festivals and celebrations all play their part.

In ten years' time: – my hope is that we will be active as an organisation in these four areas.

John Howard

Inter-faith 10 years on – another perspective

A few weeks ago I happened to be an inpatient in the Royal Free Hospital in London. In addition to a first-class service of care, the Hospital also provided permanent facilities for the spiritual needs of both patients and visitors. I saw side by side three places of worship – a chapel, a Muslim prayer room and a type of synagogue.

Furthermore, on Fridays, for the Muslim congregational prayer, the chapel was emptied so as to accommodate a large congregation. Perhaps other hospitals offer similar facilities. I know that our own New Cross Hospital does, thanks to a significant extent to the continued gentle pressure of the inter-faith group.

Over a decade ago, the City Council established its own multi-faith prayer room in the Civic Centre; similarly, the King's Church of England School in Tettenhall has been providing a multi-faith prayer room to meet the spiritual needs of its own students and staff – I know of no other schools, let alone church schools, to have provided such inter-faith facilities in this country.

As the representative of the Black Country Faiths on the Black Country Consortium, I have for many years advocated that in any regeneration involving housing estates or shopping centres such as the Mander Centre and the Merry Hill Centre, provision should be made for:

- Educational facilities
- Primary health care
- Green play areas for children



- A multi-faith centre to meet the spiritual needs of the diverse residents

The Mander Centre has for many years been providing food for the body but nothing for the spirit. With the coming of Debenham's to the Mander Centre and the plans for its radical rejuvenation, the future of the Centre seems secure. It is time for some thought to be given to the spiritual needs of shoppers and visitors. We all know that within all human beings there is a quest, frequently hidden, for some sort of higher power, a quest for the spirit. For some, it is always felt. For others, this quest becomes manifest at times of

adversity, hardship or the loss of dearest near ones. The need to be alone, meditating, grieving and praying in their distinctive ways arises. Additionally some provision is absolutely essential to enable mothers of babies and toddlers to change and breast-feed them.

With these thoughts in mind and looking to the next ten years, should we be putting something like the following for the consideration of our planners?

Three separate facts inspire the following vision:

- a. Within all human beings, there is a quest, frequently hidden, for some sort of higher power, a quest of the spirit.
- b. With the recent announcement that Debenham's will be moving in to the Mander Centre, its longer-term future looks more assured.
- c. The Mander Centre, at the centre of Wolverhampton, provides food for the body, but nothing for the spirit.

So why not dream of the following?

- A 'Spirit' space in the Mander Centre, comprising:
- A café front, with home-made and healthy fair-traded food and drink where people can rest their limbs and tend to their spirit
- An adjoining multi-media spiritual resource centre

- A quiet space/spaces (such as you can find in centres for disturbed children etc) where people could create their own meditative environment through different types of lighting, music, commentary or whatever
- A small room to view DVD's of a spiritual nature
- A larger room for conferences/talks/presentations on spiritual matters and also available for suitable letting
- Provision for changing and breast-feeding babies and toddlers
- The Inter-Faith office from which the staff could signpost people to places of worship or resources of their choice

Such a dream would require a large capital investment, together with an ongoing management subsidy. We would need the backing of some very rich individuals, concerned that our society fails to provide adequately for the life of the spirit. The 'Spirit' space, like WIFRN at present, would be inclusive and draw people together rather than set them apart, in their common quest for a deeper meaning to our everyday consumerist lives.

Dr. Harun Rashid Erik Pearse
Chairman Secretary

IVY GUTRIDGE: Memoir by Tim Fyffe for 10th anniversary of Ivy's death

How did a simple lay Methodist office secretary find herself speaking at conferences and committees in London, Australia, Italy, Austria..., and not least many British cities?

Ivy's answer was quite clear. Ivy experienced a simple, deep and overwhelming call from GOD in Christ. She went to her Minister and asked him for a task, through which she could respond to this deep sense of being summoned by GOD. "How about being secretary to the new Inter-Faith group?" Ivy's Inter-Faith work was her response to the GOD she knew in Jesus Christ.

"What's an inter-faith group?"

she asked. A fair question. There weren't any

others. Wolverhampton was the first (or second?) in Britain. Beginning from scratch – that was Ivy. Very soon she had been led to discover four essential components; in which she found the mind of GOD for her – a vision she built into what rapidly became WIFG. Ivy was above all a 'people' person.

WE MUST MEET

- As *faith communities*; visit places of worship
Learn about each other's faith

- As *leaders*: talk and eat together (monthly)
Become friends, trusting
- As *people*, meeting need Teaching English,
making close friends
- As a *group*, effective Office files organised;
superb card index – in her front room. ‘Faith
community report’ after each ‘temple’ visit.

“But I don’t want an office – we might become an organisation instead of a family”

Logic compelled accepting an office when funding allowed, but Ivy’s office rule was rigid –in this office ‘people’ come before ‘work’. Inderjit remarked that it was useless to try and get work done in the office – always interrupted by visitors. Frustrating, yes, but beautiful. Two Christians and a Hindu supporting a bereaved Muslim in prayer. A very ‘difficult’ personality for a long period finding support. Informal theological chats. Peace prayers every day. ‘Resource Centre’ more than office.

A living, transforming activity, not an easy dream, or an intellectual exercise.

Legwork 24/24 with Harun to solve the ‘Schools Turban crisis’ – first social battle of many. Frequent visits to other cities to set up ‘I/F’. London, to be a founder member of the I/F Network. Italy, Austria, Australia, America, for Religion & Peace (post Assisi). Constant demands to speak from churches, schools, councils. Mediating in I/F disputes. All that ‘famous’ activity based on the *constant donkey-work* of building and maintaining living, personal, friendly relations with and between a hundred different faith communities in Wolverhampton. In local or international, she was always Ivy, relating as a *person*. “Why can’t you speak like Ivy?” one church complained, when I tried to ‘explain’ I/F. She often said that WIFG was for her a better model than World Congress of Faiths (WCC) – “too intellectual”. At any moment Ivy could switch off to meet a personal request.

What you are saying makes a nonsense of all that I have given my whole life to.”

That response – of a devout Methodist to Ivy’s inter-faith vision – was often quoted by her with a chuckle. But Ivy didn’t enjoy conflict – specially if it meant hurting people. Maybe that chuckle covered up pain her vision cost her. She never spoke of pain – only the joy of her message. It was a very new message, rarely heard thirty-five years ago, often encountering bitter suspicion and opposition



in all faith communities. Ivy never made the mistake of belittling or despising the ‘simple faith’ which couldn’t accept her vision. ‘Inter-Faith’ for Ivy was never a ‘new faith’ – always a meeting of ‘old’ faiths, expanding and fulfilling them. I was rebuked by an inter-faith friend for saying that I would always love my friend to share my Christian vision. Ivy responded by supporting me: “If your vision is real to you, it’s OK to want your friends to share it.” She vehemently opposed the idea of WIFG taking a view on whether “all faiths are really one” or not. Let us rather learn to respect one another, and learn from one another.

Heaven – after hell

It seems specially tragic that such a living, loving, self-giving person as Ivy should end in Alzheimers – a very unhappy form of it that made Ivy finally totally reject visits (after a period when one could gently sing her favourite hymns with her). But beyond that, let us remember her regular quip: “I hope there will be an Inter-Faith Group in heaven.” Is she watching us – praying for and with us?

Tim Fyffe

40th Anniversary Garden Party at Bishop Clive's



Reflection on Inter-faith

Time certainly flies when you are enjoying yourself, so the saying goes. And I can concur as it's hard to believe it's been nearly two months since I left WIFRN at the end of March. So when Erik asked me to do an article for the newsletter about what I have learned about inter-faith as my time as Lead Officer, it got me thinking about what have I actually learned about inter-faith dialogue. So here are my thoughts and reflections which I hope can stimulate further thought and discussion to ensure WIFRN is in good shape to meet the inter-faith needs of the City in the years to come.



It is probably unsurpassed that a charity that was started 40 years ago is still going and providing a valuable service to the City like inter-faith is today. However, are the challenges of 40 years ago in the early seventies when communities were radically changing through immigration and in a far less tolerant society as it is today, still relevant in 2014? In the early seventies communities were radically changing because of the influx of different and new cultures, traditions and faiths. And what we don't understand, we fear, so the need for good Inter-faith dialogue at this time was so important to help maintain community cohesion, by education and breaking down the barriers that lead to community tensions and to help prevent the 'The Rivers of Blood'.

Over the years these new communities have now mainly integrated into their wider community. I say mainly because any community that doesn't integrate will always be seen as different and hard to reach by others outside of that community. Yet it is only human nature for people of any particular country, faith or culture to want to stay together. The challenge to these new communities is how

to fully integrate into the wider community but at the same time maintain one's own culture and tradition even when these cultures and traditions can sometimes be at odds with the cultures and traditions of the wider community.

In the corresponding years we have all learned to live and work together, as neighbours and work colleagues and share a lot of common values and in the process learnt from each other to make Wolverhampton the multi-cultural City it is today.

So what should we make of the political debate at the moment with the rise in popularity of UKIP and indeed the resurgence of far right politics in France and across much of Europe? Is it just a protest vote or something far more worrying? The history books are full of examples of the immigrant and minority groups being blamed for the problems of a society when things seem to go wrong.

So what is the challenge for inter-faith dialogue for today's world? The key word for me with this question is dialogue. How can you have meaningful dialogue with people of different faiths and cultures that can sometimes be so much at

odds with our own beliefs and values? I hear a lot in inter-faith dialogue about all the positive values the different faiths do have in common and we do and that should always be celebrated. However, real meaningful dialogue is about having the difficult conversations, about the things that can often separate us, an inter-faith dialogue that does not cause offence and no offence being taken. This can only happen the relationship between the people having the dialogue is built upon respect, trust and equality.

The danger to inter-faith dialogue is that if these relationships and difficult discussions aren't encouraged we will simply end up doing all the niceties' of sharing food and having the same conversations that we have had in the past. For inter-faith dialogue to be relevant today it has to be seen to be effective in the message it gives and it has to be fearless in dealing with

sometimes difficult subjects. It can encourage and facilitate discussion between different faiths and denominations that can start the long process of bringing about change.

I think human nature being what it is it will ensure that there will always be a need for inter-faith dialogue. But the key to this dialogue is the building of relationships based on a shared vision, trust and respect, across all faiths and denominations by sharing thoughts and fears, by being willing to understand, listen and learn, to challenge entrenched attitudes and beliefs that discriminate and harm people and communities.

By meeting this challenge, inter-faith will be seen and known and valued for the work it does and the benefits it brings to the City. Here for the next 40 years!

John Waterfi Id



Passover meal in the Convent

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Tarbes were delighted to welcome Martin Gombert to their Convent in Sandy lane to celebrate the Passover Meal on the evening of Wednesday April 16th, as an unusual but most moving and inspiring conclusion to an ecumenical series of Lenten discussions hosted by the Convent.

Lord Turner of Bilston 1943 - 2014

It was a very sad day when hundred's gathered together at St Leonard's Church Bilston to pay their last respects to a man who had endeared himself to so many both local and national. Most of us who knew the Turners reasonably well will know that although their title was sincerely appreciated they never the less much preferred to be called Dennis and Pat or in the case of family 'Our Kid'. But Dennis was also our kid, a local man who grew from humble beginnings to become a national and international man of stature.

He had a unique ability to transcend all barriers



of culture tradition and social status; he was simply a man of the people. For many years Dennis was Patron of Wolverhampton Interfaith and wherever and whenever he could he made very valuable contributions to our work.

I recall a very recent visit to the Palace of Westminster for a tour of the House of Lords. Unfortunately situations prevailed that meant we were late upon arrival and the only guide around was ready for home. The guide told us that the other guides had waited for some time before giving up and going home themselves. I was almost at the point of panic when Dennis emerged from a meeting and as soon as he understood the problem he said, 'Oh no, no, no, these people have come a long way for this tour today, and a tour they will have'. He then proceeded to give us a guided tour himself. In fact we went into places that were not on the guided tour. Dennis turned a situation of despair into a resounding success. Many people can say that they have had a tour of The House of Lords but how many people can say that the tour was brilliantly conducted by a Peer of the Realm, such was the man.

Dennis recognised the importance of interfaith dialogue as the only way to dispel ignorance, fear and suspicion amongst the differing faith



communities that reside in our City. Such dialogue provides positive and effective community cohesion. Of course Dennis's support was not just restricted to Wolverhampton Interfaith. He was actively involved in Fairtrade and many many other local initiatives.

Such men are a rare breed and I know that I speak for everyone at Interfaith that he is and will continue to very sadly missed.

Mike Shelley-Smith

A Tribute to Vilma Jarrett-Harvey

Vilma Jarrett-Harvey was a woman of substance. A true light that revealed 'The Way' to so many has been gently blown out.

Vilma was kind, caring, compassionate and thoughtful to others. She would without fail put others before herself; this was borne out in the many roles and responsibilities she took on within the community of Wolverhampton and beyond. One of her many passions was her work with Wolverhampton Interfaith and Regeneration Network, she was a Board Member and sat on a number of working groups, she aligned herself with the ethos and principals of the work of this Charity.

Vilma based her life on the foundation of the Gospel (the Good News), she was a dedicated Christian. A humble woman, she did not seek accolades or praise, she was willing to share her knowledge, time and talent with anyone



who needed support – whether it was secular or spiritual. She had a 'spirit of encouragement' after talking to Vilma you were energised and motivated to achieve your goal.

Proverbs 31: 29 'Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all'.

Vilma will be sadly missed, but never forgotten.

Janette Watson

New Board members

We are very pleased to announce that the Board has just approved the co-option of three additional members. Janette Watson has been a member of the Board previously and was a very close friend of Vilma Jarrett-Harvey, whose tribute she

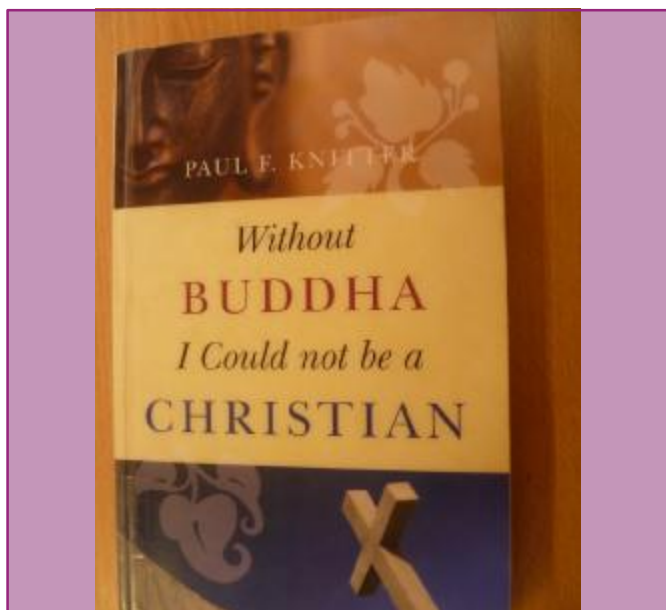
has written on page 11; Suki Sunner Rinder Salan became members of WIFRN earlier in the year and have expressed in standing for Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer respectively at the next AGM (much to Ganesh, our current Treasurer's delight!)

Treasures of the Ivy Gutridge Collection

(Located in the Faith Section in the Central Library)

Without Buddha I Could Not Be A Christian

By Paul F. Knitter



Being a Buddhist who was formerly a Christian, I have been asked to do a brief review of this book. The author takes the reader along the path which has led him to call himself, as he now does, a Buddhist Christian. He's a Catholic Christian, baptised in 1939 from the cradle, who nevertheless went on to 'take refuge', that is to become what in the West is called a Buddhist and in the East is called a follower of the Dharma (or



Way). This he did in 2008.

Most of us would agree, I think, that it's not a good idea to take teachings of different religions and splice them together as if to make them one faith. For a start, you can't be sure that you've properly understood a religion without having grown up in it from childhood, or at least made a deep and extensive study of it. Not only differences of teaching, but differences of emphasis need to be

comprehended and you'll need some knowledge of that faith's history to account for some at least of its peculiarities. Putting together parts of differing faiths may produce a result which is faithful to none of them.

However, this author, Paul Knitter, is a Professor of Theology at New York's Union Theological Seminary and should be equal to the task of shining a Buddhist light on Catholic theology and equally a Catholic light on Buddhist without mishandling either faith. He tells us that his need to do so in the first case arose from his need to be sure in himself that he really does believe the tenets of the Christian creed and does not just assent to them as a matter of habit.

Any person of faith, he says, usually draws his beliefs from three main sources:

1. the original scriptures of his religion;
2. the traditions of his religion as preserved and handed on in his religious community (i.e. his church, mosque, temple, etc.);
3. his experience of how his faith relates to the world he lives in; and then, he says, for people in the modern world, there is a fourth source:
4. the encounters he has with believers in religions other than his own.

This need to relate our own religion to the religions of other cultures is something which has arisen only in the modern world because ours is a time in which cultures tend to merge so that modern cities have all become meeting places of differing beliefs. In the modern world I may find that both I and my neighbour believe in God, but each in

a rather different way and I shall probably find myself wondering at one time or another, how far his God and my God may resemble or differ from each other.

This wondering, or curiosity, has led Professor Knitter to engage with other religions whenever able to do so – with Jews, Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, Native Americans. And for him the most rewarding dialogue has been with Buddhists. (This may be influenced, he adds, by the fact that his wife is a Buddhist). Though I call myself a Buddhist I have to recognise that this author knows more about my religion than I do as well as being thoroughly grounded, as one would expect, in his Catholicism. As a Catholic he is influenced by that school of thought called 'Liberation Theology' and he sets out his understanding of his faith, along with insights drawn from the Buddhist Way, under the following heads: the teaching on God, on life after death, on Jesus Christ, on prayer and worship, on social justice.

As might be expected, this is not an easy book to read. It delves deep into the meanings of different doctrines, not all of which will be familiar to all readers. Nevertheless it offers many rewarding insights. I found myself sceptical of some conclusions, but agreeing with others.

If you are going to ask the question: 'Why does this author say that without Buddha he could not be a Christian?' I can only report that in my opinion you'd need to read his book from start to finish to find out. And even then you might not be sure of the answer. I'm not sure either.

Malcolm Verrall

A new name for WIFRN?

Your suggestions please

The funding for our Regeneration work undertaken by John Waterfield came to an end in March – our rather long-winded name – Wolverhampton Inter-faith and Regeneration Network – no longer reflects what we are about. So if you have any bright and

simple suggestion for our new name, please let us have it by no later than July 15th so that the Board can consider it at its meeting on July 16th and make recommendations for our AGM in September.

Bring and Share lunches

The Bring and Share lunches – on the third Tuesday of each month – continue to be well-attended and stimulating for both mind and body. In the last newsletter, we reported on the first in the series, given by Harun, our Chairman. Since then we have been enlightened and entertained in turn by Parveen Brigue, Prem Lal, Bhajan Devsi and Ganesh De.



It has been refreshing to experience the varied approaches of our contributors – Parveen gave a very personal account of her understanding of Hinduism, the rituals she performs and how her beliefs impact on her life. I was particularly struck by the importance and significance of regular Fasting. Prem's emphasis was on the essential unity of God and our inability to describe him – those of us from the Abrahamic religions may not readily associate such an insight from the Eastern religions, yet the belief in one Supreme God also came over from the contributions of Bhajan and Ganesh – Bhajan so erudite and knowledgeable, with his rich experience and appreciation not only of Sikhism, but also of Hinduism and Islam, whilst

Ganesh captured our attention and imagination in his evocation of God as Mother.

Each of the sessions has led to lively discussions and additional insights, all in the true spirit of inter-faith dialogue which seeks to listen carefully, treasure the often unexpected areas of belief which we share and explore further those beliefs which differentiate us.

We have speakers for sessions up to September – please let the office know if you would like to lead a session any time from the month of October – it will be a privilege to learn from your own particular experience, belief and insights.

Erik Pearse

Earth Pilgrim: Fund-raising viewing at Bhajan Devsi's

On a gusty, bitterly cold, wintry evening, around 20 people from the Interfaith and Regeneration Network gathered at Bhajan Devsi's house to attend a film- showing event. The film shown was arranged by Peter Craig from Satsang and it delineated the spiritual journey of the presenter Satish Kumar across Dartmoor in all seasons of the year.



Satish Kumar comes with a variegated background in his unflinching quest for seeking oneness with nature. He began his life as a wandering Jain monk, joined Vinoba Bhave in his epic struggle to persuade rich landowners to share their land with the dispossessed, went on a 8,000 mile long journey on foot without a passport or money to take the message of non-violence to the four corners of the then nuclear world, namely London, Paris, Moscow and Washington. The inspiration to go on this incredible journey came from his reading of speeches by Bertrand Russell who had gone to prison for his commitment to nuclear disarmament.

Although Satish did not have anything tangible to show for his epic walk, he had an enormous impact in the UK and he settled in Devon some 36 years ago editing the Resurgence and Ecologist magazine. Since then he has been teaching many of the world's greatest thinkers on the need to value and preserve nature rather than focus on economic matters alone. He strongly feels that spiritual aspect of the environment is the first casualty of modern thinking and that we have ignored the power of reverence and love, which is not the same as religion.

The film, with its breathtaking photography and the

irrepressible, ever-renewing grandeur of nature in all seasons, was further enhanced by the narrative that Satish Kumar shared with passion. It is an evocative account of his spiritual journey into the ethereal world of Dartmoor. Through changing seasons, he walks the moor and feels a natural surge of joy when he sees ancient woods and rivers and the wealth of wildlife flourishing there. His reflections on the natural world are lyrical, imbued with passion and very uplifting. Although the film sent out many powerful messages but the core message highlighted the fundamental unity of life, which manifests in millions of forms. He very eloquently and convincingly asserts that the unity and diversity of life are in an eternal dance. All parts of nature are interdependent and of equal value. And we cannot afford to stand detached from nature. We are nature and we have to remember Gandhi's words: Be the change you wish to see in the world.

The discussion that followed was interesting and participative; the thought-provoking film attracted a range of relevant comments. Before the end of the evening, we enjoyed the generous hospitality of Bhajan and Kamaljit Devsi. A very satisfying and rewarding evening indeed!

Sehdev Bismal MBE

Dates for your Diary

Saturday July 5th Coach trip to Worcester Cathedral, Muckwell Abbey and Worcestershire Central Mosque

Tuesday July 15th Bring and Share Lunch led by Rev. John Howard

Saturday July 19th Satsang Association Day of Reflection
'Questions for the Spiritual Traveller'

Sunday August 3rd WWI Commemoration Vigil at St. Peter's
(7.15-9.00 p.m.)

Tuesday August 19th Bring and Share lunch led by Desmond Pearce

Saturday August 30th Visit to Bala Ji Mandir (Tividale), Masjid Anwar ul -
Uloom Mosque and Guru Nanak Gurdwara (Smethwick)

Friday September 5th 40th Anniversary social/cultural Evening

Tuesday September 16th Bring and Share Lunch led by Rinder Salan

Tuesday September 23rd Annual General Meeting (Speaker – Simon Warren,
CEO of Wolverhampton City Council)

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