

Issue 114

December 2019



*Peace and
Joy at
Christmas
and
throughout
the
New Year!*

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Editorial

Recently, many people asked what we do and what I did, in particular, for Inter Faith Week. I told them that, when Inter Faith Week started, we organized activities during the first two years, then decided that, as so many other events were taking place, we would either join with others or support whatever events we could by just turning up, advertise them or assure them of our prayers. Off the top of my head, I could not remember where I was or what I did this year. Yet, most of the articles in this issue reflect on events that took place during, just before or after Inter Faith Week. We were involved in many of them.

National Inter Faith Week now runs for eight days from Remembrance Sunday till the following Sunday (this year from 10-17 November). During that period, many faiths celebrated their own festivals or anniversaries. We include some, but not all. Most invited people of different faiths to join them. It is reassuring that, largely due to the Inter Faith Network UK and the many Forums of Faith, that now exist throughout the country, so much inter faith understanding and cooperation is present everywhere. It is so vital to a peaceful, cohesive and integrated society. It is a shame, however, that, at the same time, we are experiencing a resurgence of racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, islamophobia and xenophobia, which destroy the fabric of society.

From a Roman Catholic perspective, it is useful to read the Vatican messages to the different faith communities. They tend to express the views of Pope Francis on our relations with one another, with people of different faiths and with all humanity. This year's messages to Hindus and Sikhs are largely based on the joint document Pope Francis signed with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar on promoting 'Human Fraternity for Peace and Living Together'. Both messages conclude inviting believers to "*join hands with people of other religious traditions and with people of good will, and strive to do all we can, to build a more fraternal and peaceful society*".

I am happy to report that this level of cooperation and mutual trust is increasing among people of faith. This is most evident in the various interfaith groups, where people share their faith freely and cooperate in many joint projects, which help to break down barriers, develop long-lasting friendships and enhance community well-being and cohesion. We still have a long way to go. But we all need to play our part even in a small way. It is what God wants and what Jesus teaches. I hope that the contributions in this issue, which cover a variety of topics, will provide food for thought and help inspire a level of interfaith commitment and action.

In the meantime, we wish all our readers joyful cultural and religious festivals. There are many in December and even more in January.

Wishing you a happy 2020 filled with much joy, peace and blessings!

Jon and the Westminster Interfaith Team

Year of the Word

From the First Sunday in Advent this year (1st December), the Roman Catholic Church embarks on a year devoted to celebrating, living and sharing the Word of God, which Christians find in the Bible, their Holy Scriptures. The First Sunday in Advent is also the beginning of a new liturgical year, when many Christians start a new cycle of readings from the Bible, which, this year, includes the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, one of Jesus' first followers.

From an interreligious point of view, I would like to explore briefly the Holy Books of some faith traditions, discover how we can benefit from gaining an insight into their faith and practices and perhaps help us draw closer together as people of faith. In this article, we shall look briefly at the Christian and Jewish Scriptures. In later editions, we shall consider the Scriptures of other faiths.

As mentioned in the previous issue, all religions consider that their Holy Books are divinely inspired and contain the Word of God. We may wonder how all these Scriptures can be the Word of God. Although, some have similarities, most are very different from one another. Many faithful will insist that only their Scriptures are the authentic Word, others will consider all Scriptures sacred, some will pick and choose.

The Catholic Church teaches that the Word of God is present in all Scriptures, even in the writings of many philosophers and secular authors. Indeed, since the first century, Christians have detected "seeds of the Word" in the surrounding culture, which can lead people to God (*Ad Gentes* 11). The Second Vatican Council (1959-65) in one of its publications declared: "the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings, which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless, often reflect a ray of that truth, which enlightens all people" (*Nostra Aetate* 2).

Christian Scriptures

Christians regularly turn to the Bible for prayer and meditation, guidance and encouragement, because they believe that the Bible contains the Word of God. Christians, of all traditions, may read the Word of God, privately on their own, share it in small groups or hear it proclaimed at their regular services and try to live by what it teaches.

The Bible is a compendium of 73 books, written by different authors about God's relationship with humanity. Forty-six books form the Old Testament, which includes the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible); historical books, describing the life of the Jewish people; Wisdom books, full of beautiful prayers and poems; and eighteen books of Prophets. Sometimes, commentators refer to the Old Testament as the Jewish Scriptures and the first five books of the Bible as the Jewish Torah. (*See below for further explanation*).

Another 27 books form the New Testament. It includes 4 Gospels, or the Good News of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; the account of the early Christian community in Acts of the Apostles; 13 letters (Epistles) by St Paul to friends or to Christian communities; 8 more letters by different writers; and the Book of Revelation (or Apocalypse).

All these books of the Bible contain the eternal Word of God, which enriches and renews every thought, word, prayer and action of millions of Christians, but the main source of inspiration and guidance for Christians comes mainly from the New Testament and especially from the Gospels.

Many Christian communities often show great respect for the Book of the Gospels. The deacon carries it during the entrance procession and when it is time to proclaim the Gospel message, there is another procession with servers bearing candles and incense. Some even leave the book open on a lectern, surrounded by candles, to emphasize its importance.

Jewish Scriptures

The Hebrew Bible consists of 24 Books, therefore, not quite the same as the 46 Books of Old Testament. However, the Hebrew Bible does include the same first five books of the Christian Bible with Hebrew names rather than Greek names. Collectively, these are the five Books of Moses or *Torah*. The other 19 Books include the Prophets (*Nevi'im*) and the Writings (*Ketuvim*) such as Psalms, Lamentations and Proverbs. Using the first letters of these groups of books to form an acronym, the Hebrew Bible is referred to as TaNaKh (often-spelled Tanakh).

For Jews, the main source of divine inspiration and guidance comes from the *Torah*, which literally means “instruction”, “teaching” or “Law”. However, the *Torah* has a range of meanings. It usually mean the first five books of Moses or the **Written Torah**. It can also mean the continued narrative from all the 24 books, and it can even refer to the totality of Jewish teaching, culture, and practice, whether derived from biblical texts or later rabbinic writings. This is often known as the **Oral Torah**. When Jews talk about “the *Torah*,” they are often referring to a parchment scroll version of the Five Books of Moses that they keep in the ark of the synagogue and take out, with great reverence, to read during services.

The *Torah* is the central and most important document of Judaism. Jews believe that God dictated the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai 50 days after their exodus from Egyptian slavery. The Torah shows how God wants Jews to live. Indeed, one could say that it contains wisdom and guidance for every person, Jewish or otherwise. *Torah* contains 613 commandments. Jews refer to the ten best-known ones as the ten statements. Christians call these statement the 10 Commandments, sometimes they call them by the Greek word for ten words: Decalogue—the ten words of God.

Jews read the *Torah* every Sabbath at the Synagogue. Handwritten *Torah* scrolls are taken out of the Ark ceremoniously and a portion is read (chanted) during the Service. The reading of the Law should be continuous, so when the Jews come to the

end of the last book (Deuteronomy), they open a new scroll immediately and start reading from the beginning of the first book (Genesis) without a break. This is because the *Torah* is a circle that never ends. The Word of God is eternal. This happens at the festival of *Simchat Torah* (Rejoicing in the Torah), which marks the completion of the annual cycle of readings from the *Torah*. At this festival, the *Torah* scrolls are paraded around the synagogue, with children dancing and singing, as do many of the adults, giving as many people as possible the honour of carrying a *Torah* scroll.

Sunday of the Word of God

In an Apostolic Letter instituting a special Sunday of the Word of God, Pope Francis asked that each community should mark the day with solemnity. He writes, “It is important, however, that in the Eucharistic celebration the sacred text be enthroned, in order to focus the attention of the assembly on the normative value of God’s word”. He declared the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time to be devoted to the celebration, study and dissemination of the word of God. That Sunday, I think, falls in January and coincides with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity as well as Holocaust Memorial Day. Pope Francis says that it will be a fitting time of the year, “*when we are encouraged to strengthen our bonds with the Jewish people and to pray for Christian unity. This is more than a temporal coincidence: the celebration of the Sunday Word of God has ecumenical value, since the Scriptures point out, for those who listen, the path to authentic and firm unity*”.

By getting to know our own Scriptures better and finding out about those of others, we can gain a better understanding of the beliefs and practices of others. For Sunday of the Word, it may be an idea to hold a Unity Service, which includes Christians of different denominations as well as Jews from different traditions. It would be an ideal way of getting to know one another and sharing what we have in common.

On the third Sunday in January, the Baha'i community celebrates World Religion Day. Its aim is to foster good interfaith understanding and harmony by emphasizing the common denominators underlying all religions. In 2020, Chinese New Year falls on 25th January. Two more reasons to join hands in harmony, rejoice, celebrate and reach out to one another in friendship.

‘Journeying in Dialogue’

Saturday 18 January (11am-4pm) at Birmingham University

An ecumenical and interfaith event at the start of Christian Unity Week to mark the 100th Birth Anniversary of the founder of the Focolare Movement, Chiara Lubich, who reached out to people of all faiths and none, by living the Word of God every day in a radical way. Speakers include, Most Reverend Bernard Longley, *Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham*, Sheikh Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali, *Director of the International Institute for Islamic Studies*, Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh Ji, *Leader of the GNNSJ Sikh community Birmingham*. All welcome. Admission free. To book and details: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/journeying-in-dialogue-tickets-76427999203?aff=ebdssbdestsearch>

Vatican Message for Deepavali

As usual, the Celebrations for Divali by the Hindu, Jain and Sikh communities, on the whole, went off smoothly, joyfully and peacefully. Of course, there were some objections from some people, even from the Catholic community, especially those who do not seem to know what the Catholic Church teaches about our relations with people of different faiths. The messages from the Vatican to people of different faiths help highlight what our attitude should be towards them.

This year, the Vatican message for Divali refers greatly to the joint document Pope Francis signed with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in February. They would like and encourage people of all faiths to study the document and put the recommendations into practice to help bring about World Peace and Universal Fraternity. Indeed, the message concludes inviting us all to join hands with all people of faith and good will to help build a more peaceful and fraternal society.

I am pleased to announce that many Catholics personally delivered or sent their own greetings, together with those of the Vatican, to many Mandirs, Hindu businesses and friends. It was good to hear that many Christians attended Divali celebrations and some churches offered the use of their parish hall to the local Hindu community.

Believers: Builders of Fraternity and Peaceful Coexistence

Dear Hindu Friends,

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue sends you cordial greetings and sincere good wishes as you celebrate Deepavali on 27 October this year. May this festival of lights illumine your hearts and homes and bring to your families and communities joy and happiness, peace and prosperity. At the same time, may it strengthen your spirit of fraternity with one another.

Alongside the experience of unprecedented advancement in many fields, we live at a time when, on the one hand, efforts are being made towards interreligious and intercultural dialogue, cooperation and fraternal solidarity. On the other hand, there is apathy, indifference and even hatred among some religious people towards others. This is often caused by a failure to recognize the ‘other’ as a brother or sister. Such an attitude can arise from misguided, ungenerous or unsympathetic sentiments, which upset and unsettle the very fabric of harmonious coexistence in society. It is with concern about this situation that we deem it fitting and beneficial to share with you some thoughts on the need for every individual, particularly Christians and Hindus, to be builders of fraternity and peaceful coexistence wherever they are.

Religion fundamentally inspires us “to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved” (*Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, co-signed by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, the

Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019). It teaches us, moreover, to respect the inviolable dignity and the inalienable rights of others without any unwarranted bias towards their creed or culture. Only when adherents of religions demand of themselves a life consistent with their religious ethic will they be seen to fulfil their role as builders of peace and as witnesses to our shared humanity. For this reason, religions are to sustain the efforts their adherents make in leading an authentic life so as to “bring forth the fruits of peace and brotherhood, for it is in the nature of religion to foster... an increasingly fraternal relationship among people” (Pope John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1992). As such, living in a spirit of fraternity and fellowship through constant dialogue should be a natural corollary of being a religious person, Hindu or Christian.

Though negative news dominates the headlines, this should not dampen our resolve to sow seeds of fraternity, for there is a hidden sea of goodness that is growing and leads us to hope in the possibility of building, together with the followers of other religions and all men and women of good will, a world of solidarity and peace. The conviction that building a world of fraternity is possible is reason enough for us to engage all the more in efforts towards building the edifice of fraternity and peaceful coexistence, keeping “the good of everyone at heart” (Pope Francis, *Message for the Opening of the Annual Interreligious Prayer Meeting for Peace, “Bridges of Peace”*, Bologna, 14 October 2018).

It is a happy coincidence that the beginning of this month marked the 150th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, “an outstanding and courageous witness to truth, love and nonviolence” (Pope John Paul II, *Prayer for Peace at the Conclusion of the Visit to Raj Ghat*, Delhi, 1 February 1986) and a valiant protagonist of human fraternity and peaceful coexistence. We would do well to draw inspiration from his example in living peaceful coexistence.

As believers grounded in our own religious convictions and with shared concern for the welfare of the human family, may we join hands with those of different religious traditions and all people of good will, and strive to do all we can – with a sense of shared responsibility – to build a more fraternal and peaceful society!

Wishing all of you a joyful celebration of Deepavali!

Miguel Ángel Cardinal Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ President

Rev. Msgr. Indunil Kodithuwakku Janakaratne Kankanamalage Secretary

Climate Change

Hinduism has always been an environmentally sensitive philosophy. No religion, perhaps, lays as much emphasis on environmental ethics as Hinduism. The Mahabharata, Ramayana, Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Puranas and Smirit contain the earliest messages for preservation of the environment and ecological balance. Nature, or earth, has never been considered a hostile environment to be conquered or dominated. In fact, man is forbidden from exploiting nature. He is taught to live in harmony with nature and recognise that divinity prevails in all elements, including plants and animals. The Rishis of the past have always had a great respect for nature. Theirs was not a superstitious primitive theology. They perceived that all material manifestations are a shadow of the spiritual. The Bhagavad Gita advises us not to try to change the environment, improve it, or wrestle with it. If it seems hostile at times tolerate it. Ecology is an inherent part of a spiritual world view in Hinduism.

In the Bhagavad Gita, sloka 20, Chapter 10, Lord Krishna says “I and the Self seated in the heart of all creatures. I am the beginning, the middle and the very end of all beings. All beings have, therefore to be treated alike.”

In Hindu religion all ceremonies end with a Hawan: We give thanks to nature and the planets as well as our spiritual leaders. We are taught that mankind must live in harmony with nature. We give thanks to the earth ‘PRITVI MATA’ by bowing to the earth in prayer. We pray to the planets in the solar system to be in harmony with each other. The five elements: space, air, fire, water and earth, are the foundation of an interconnected web of life. Dharma, often translated as duty, can be reinterpreted to include our responsibility to care for the earth. Hinduism recognises that the human body is composed of and related to these five elements, and connects each of the elements to one of the five senses. The nose is related to earth, tongue to water, eyes to fire, skin to air, ears to space. This bond between our senses and the elements is the foundation of our human relationship with the natural world. For Hinduism, nature and the environment are not outside us, not alien or hostile to us. They are an inseparable part of our existence. They constitute our very bodies.

In Glimpses of Indian Culture (p106), Dr Giriraj Shah states that Hinduism has always been coined an ‘environmentally friendly’ religion. Hindus regard everything around them as pervaded by a subtle divine presence, may it be rivers, mountains, lakes, animals, flora, the mineral world, as well as the stars and planets. It is so because the divine reality is present as Pran/Shakti energy, power, in every electron, particle, atom, cell and in every manifestation of matter. It is its very fabric. Just like the sparks of a fire are of the same essence as the fire they issued from, so is the entire creation of the same essence of the divine. Just as Hindus greet each other saying “*Namaste*”, which means: I recognise and salute the Divine within you, so do they recognise the same Divine essence in all around them.

To quote Mahatma Gandhi: “I bow my head in reverence to our ancestors for their sense of the beautiful in nature and for their investing beautiful manifestations of nature with religious significance.”

However, this is not true anymore. In recent times, the sacred river of the Ganges has been polluted. There is now a cleaning up team on the way. Mass tourism and the introduction of plastics are destroying the natural habitat of rivers, oceans and land. We recently saw the burning of the Amazon forest. As President Macron said the lungs of the planet are burning. War and fighting machines are creating havoc everywhere.

In the words of Dr Karan Singh, in *Essays of Hinduism* p.47: “in our arrogance and ignorance, we have destroyed the environment of this planet. We have polluted the oceans. We have made the air unbreathable. We have desecrated nature and decimated wildlife. But the Vedantic seers knew that man was not something apart from nature, and therefore, they constantly exhort us that, while we work for our own salvation, we must also work for the welfare of all beings.”

Although Indian philosophers believed that the world goes through a cycle of evolution and decline, it always admonished reverence for life, respect for all forms of life and preservation of biodiversity – a continuation of evolution.

The new philosophy of life challenges the arrogance of humans. The Earth is not for humans only, it is for life – life in its various forms and structures. While individuals have a short and transient existence, evolution continues inexorably. The consciousness and spirits are beyond material existence, beyond time and space. They are eternal and an integral part of Brahman. Rig Veda states:

Nature's beauty is an art of God. Let us feel the touch of God's invisible hands in everything beautiful. By the first touch of His hand rivers throb and ripple. When He smiles the sun shines, the moon glimmers, the stars twinkle, the flowers bloom. By the first rays of the rising sun, the universe is stirred; the shining gold is sprinkled on the smiling buds of roses; the fragrant air is filled with sweet melodies of singing birds, the dawn is the dream of God's creative fancy.

In the Vedic literatures, Mother Earth is personified as the Goddess Bhumi or Pritvi. She is the abundant mother who showers her mercy on her children. Her beauty and profusion are vividly portrayed in the beautiful hymn to the Earth in the Arthava Veda from which the following verses are taken:

Your castles and fortresses are built by divine engineers. In every province of yours, people are working hard. You bear all precious things in your womb. May God, the Lord of life, make you pleasing on all sides. O mother, with your oceans, rivers and other bodies of water, you give us land to grow grains, on which our survival depends. Please give us much milk, fruits, water and cereals as we need to eat and drink. O mother, bearing folk who speak different languages and follow different religions, treating them all as residents of the same house, please pour, like a cow, who never fails, a thousand streams of treasure to enrich me. May you, our motherland, on whom grow wheat, rice and barley, on whom are born five races of mankind, be nourished by the cloud and loved by the rain.

(Source: *Hinduism and Ecology: Seeds of Truth* by Ranchor Prime p.30-31)

Shanti

Remembrance Day

Those Who Gave Their Today for Tomorrow

Watching Gary Lineker's documentary on television about his grandfather, who fought in WW2 in Italy, reminded me that, many people of all faiths, cultures and none, suffered and died all over the world during both World Wars. We often forget that troops fought on many fronts in both wars. Everybody played a part. The D-Day landings in Normandy may have failed if it was not for the Allies who had to face top Nazi troops in other areas, including at Monte Cassino in Italy. It is unfortunate that many call them D-Day Dodgers. Many died. A few survived. They are all unsung heroes we do not usually hear about, but we do remember them especially this week.

I am pleased to publish the following message from Malcolm Deboo, with his permission. It highlights a few individuals, probably unknown to many, who, in the Second World War, gave their today for our tomorrow.

"Many of us are aware that four Zoroastrian Engineer Brothers served during WW2 in the RAF and IRAF with distinction. Three of them were awarded the DFC. Their photographs are displayed at RAF Cranwell.

Yesterday, Saturday 9th November 2019, I had the honour to be invited to the Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall, as a VIP guest of the Royal British Legion. I was invited in my capacity as the Co Moderator of the Faiths Communities Forum (FCF), Inter Faith Network of the UK (IFN) together with Jatinder Singh Birdi, Co-Chair of IFN.

This year, the Royal British Legion is asking communities in the UK to remember the sacrifice and service of Britain's friends and allies - including those whose contributions went unseen.

Besides the 75th anniversary of the D Day in Normandy, the Festival in presence of Her Majesty and the Royal Family, remembered the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Monte Cassino, Italy, Battles of Kohima in Nagaland and Imphal in Manipur, North East India.

When the Kohima epitaph; "When you go home Tell them of us and say For your Tomorrow We gave our today", was read out I was recalling that my grandfather served in Imphal. Ervad Homi Dordi, Sam Manekshaw MC, together with other Indians, Africans, Chinese, British, Australians, Americans served in the Burma Campaign and successfully repelled the Japanese.

At Monte Cassino, the young Ervad (Dr) Sorabji H Kutar served as an Army Surgeon in the Eighth Army. Just like in 1914, many Zoroastrians volunteered to serve the King Emperor in 1939. Dr Kutar was in the UK in September 1939, when WWII was declared. He was with the Eighth Army in North Africa under Field Marshal Montgomery, then moved onto Italy and all the way to Germany. Later Dr Sorabji H Kutar was appointed by the ZTFE as the first and only High Priest of Zoroastrians of UK and Europe.

One of the highest-ranking Indians during WWII was Major General Sir Heerajee Jehangirjee Manekjee Cursetjee KCIE, CSI, DSO, who, in the 1960s, served as a ZTFE Managing Committee Member. In 1941, he was appointed Honorary Surgeon to King George VI. During WWI, Captain Cursetjee served with the 14th Ferozepore Sikhs, one of the oldest regiments in the Indian Army today. His medals, dog tags and other personal items are exhibited at the National Army Museum, Chelsea.

Zoroastrian Doctors and Surgeons have served the British Armed forces before WWI and continue to do so in modern times. They have served in the Falklands, Operation Desert Storm, Afghanistan and Iraq.

In a few hours, our patron Lord Karan F Bilimoria CBE DL and I will represent the ZTFE and the Zoroastrian community at the Cenotaph for the National Service of Remembrance. Our Resident Priest Yazad T Bhadha and Honorary Secretary Rohinton F Munshi will be representing the ZTFE and Zoroastrian community at the Harrow Service of Remembrance. We will be remembering those who served and gave their today for our tomorrow.”

Malcolm M Deboo

PS My uncle, who is Italian, joined the British troops in North Africa and acted as a guide throughout the campaign in Italy from Southern Italy to Monte Cassino, across the Apennines and onto Florence till the end of the War. He kept a diary of events and his experiences of the campaign. It is fascinating. JD

Rajgir Peace Pagoda Golden Jubilee

Just after our multi-faith pilgrimage for peace in June, Bhikkhu Nagase asked if I could get the Vatican to send a message for the 50th Anniversary of the Rajgir Shanti Stupa on 25 October 2019. I told him I would try but could not promise anything.

I contacted the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue immediately and the Secretary replied suggesting I ask the Catholic Bishops of India or the Bishop of the Diocese, which I did. I also sent them some background information. I received a reply soon afterwards by post with loads of stamps on the envelope.

I delivered the message to Ven. Nagase at the London Peace Pagoda in Battersea Park, but did not keep a copy. It expressed the joy, congratulations and good wishes as well as a blessing. It concluded with a quote from Martin Luther King Jr on Gandhi, which was appropriate because the Rajgir Jubilee coincided with the 150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. I am sure the organizers were delighted.

As we have had very good relations with the Japanese Buddhist community who look after Peace Pagodas all over the world, we thought we should also send a message. Here it is:

Dear Ven. Gyoten Yoshida and members of Nipponzan Myohoji,

Greetings from London on this very special occasion: the 50th Anniversary of the Rajgir Peace Pagoda, which also falls in the same month as the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

Bihar, and Rajgir, in particular, has a long and interesting history for all Indians, especially for Buddhists, Hindus and Jains, so it is most appropriate that you should be celebrating the presence of this Shanti Stupa, a powerful symbol of peace and unity, in such an important place.

Westminster Interfaith, the agency for interreligious dialogue of the Diocese of Westminster, has had good relations with most faith groups, since its foundation in the early 1980s. In particular, we have had close relations with the Japanese Buddhist Order of Nipponzan Myohoji ever since the inauguration of the two Peace Pagodas in England: one in Milton Keynes, the other in Battersea Park, London. In fact, our founder, Brother Daniel Faivre SG, participated in the peace walk from Canterbury to Battersea Park for the inauguration of the London Peace pagoda in 1985. Like all Peace Pagodas, it stands as a powerful witness to peace and tranquillity in a wounded world. Every year, we celebrate the anniversary with a multi-faith ceremony, but we also gather at the pagodas, throughout the year, to celebrate Buddhist festivals and hold multi-faith peace events.

In 1966, at Kudan Dojo, the Most Venerable Nichidatsu Fujii said that Mahatma Gandhi had a dream that independence could be won without firing a bullet. He encouraged others to dream that they too might be free. That dream came true. Nichidatsu Fujii then added that Buddhism is a world of dreams and quoted Maha Bodhisattva Nichiren, who said that a nation would become peaceful by chanting *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*, but no one believed him. Nichidatsu Fujii continued: *“To believe in such a thing is a dream. However, this dream has a goal, that by chanting Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo, we will bring peace to the nation, peace to the world. No one can say for sure that this dream is not going to come true. When we look around to see what other paths are available to us to make this world a peaceful place, all we see in reality is killing.”*

Unfortunately, we will not be able to be with you on this occasion, but we join you with our prayers, dreams and actions for a peaceful world. We pray that the Peace Pagoda may always remain a place of peace and tranquillity in this troubled world; a constant reminder that we are all called to be witnesses of peace, truth and justice. We pray that it may continue to be a powerhouse of prayer, where people can come together, in a spirit of friendship and solidarity, to pray for peace for the benefit of all humanity and creation. May peace reign in our hearts, in our minds, in our families, in our neighbourhood, in our nations and in the world.

Jon

Guru Nanak's Birth Anniversary

It seems most Gurdwaras and Sikh organisations celebrated the 550th Birth Anniversary of their founder Guru Nanak Dev Ji, which fell on 12th November this year. Festivities, in many places around the world, started last year in preparation for this important anniversary but there was a concentration of activities nearer the actual date.

Southall had a massive procession on 3rd November with thousands of people taking part. Hounslow Gurdwara prepared a packed programme of activities every day from Thursday 7th November to Tuesday 12th November. The place was buzzing with children performing plays, music, talks and an excellent exhibition on Guru Nanak and his Udasis (journeys) across Asia and the Middle East, spreading the message of peace, equality and compassion meeting people of different cultures and faith traditions. The programme booklet was also full of very interesting information about the life and teachings of Guru Nanak, which complemented the exhibition. It also had background information on many of the invited speakers. The free Sikh community kitchen (*Langar*) served food all day. The turban tying activity *Dastar* was fascinating. I almost volunteered to have a turban tied on my head. Some faith leaders shared their thoughts and impressions of Guru Nanak. I was pleased to see members of Hounslow Friends of Faith there.

On Friday evening, 8th November, City Sikhs marked Guru Nanak's anniversary on the 9th floor at City Hall. Hundreds of people, mainly Sikhs, came along for the event. The Punjab Restaurant provided us with some excellent vegetarian snacks. The Raj Academy played Sikh spiritual music (*Kirtan*) on traditional instruments. There were speeches, readings and reflections on the Guru's life and teachings. The interfaith speakers were Dr Deesha Chadha from the Hindu Forum for Britain and Faiths Forum for London, Imam Sayed Ali Abbas Razawi from the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society, and Rev Dr John Parry from the Interfaith Centre for London. As the event took place on the eve of Inter Faith Week, Dr David Hampshire, Assistant Director of the Inter Faith Network UK, spoke about the significance of the anniversary to Sikhs across the world.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, gave the main talk. He spoke about the importance of the 550th anniversary as well as the relevance of Guru Nanak's teachings in present day society. He praised British Sikhs for their entrepreneurial spirit and achievements, as well as their selfless service (*Sewa*) to the community. He cited, in particular, the Sikh practice in Gurdwaras in UK and across the world, to open their doors to people who want to be fed irrespective of their background, religion or whether they are rich or poor. Jasvir Singh OBE, Chair of City Sikhs, presented the Mayor with a book on 'Mantra Art' by an artist based in Canada.

It was a wonderful evening. I felt very comfortable. I knew many people, met old friends and made new acquaintances. It was a good way to celebrate Guru Nanak's Birth Anniversary as well as begin Inter Faith Week.

Vatican message To Sikhs

The year 2019 was especially important for Sikhs. They celebrated the 550th Birth Anniversary of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of the Sikh religion and their first Guru, who was born in 1469.

Shortly before the date of the anniversary, I sent Vatican greetings by post or email to many Gurdwaras, Sikh organizations and friends. Some replied with very warm and positive comments of thanksgiving. Some of us managed to deliver the greetings personally to Sikhs we know or to local Gurdwaras.

Alfred Agius, for instance, attended a celebration on Saturday 9th November, in an hotel owned by a Muslim family. Previously, the site had been the mansion of a Catholic family, where Masses were celebrated on Sundays before there was any church in Slough. Alfred was part of the parish delegation, which included the Parish Priest, the key catechist and her husband. During the course of a sumptuous meal, there were lots of talks on the life and faith of Guru Nanak by members of the Sikh community. Faith leaders were also given a slot to speak. The Parish Priest spoke on behalf of local Catholics, delivered the Vatican message and gave the organizers a copy of Br. Daniel's 'Transcendence'.

in the Gurdwara in Hounslow, I read a slightly modified version of the Vatican greetings to Sikhs. After a brief introduction, in which I referred to Guru Nanak's five journeys, during which, some say, he visited Pope Leo X in Rome in 1520 and told him to abolish slavery. I also commented on Pope Francis' contact with people of different faiths, including Sikhs and read the message aloud. The audience appreciated the message and a number of people commented favourably on the content, which invites Christians and Sikhs to promoting human fraternity together. Here it is:

Dear Sikh Friends,

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue sends you its most felicitous congratulations on the momentous commemoration of the 550th Birth Anniversary of Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji (1469-1539) celebrated worldwide on 12 November this year. May the celebrations and festivities marking this historic event fill your hearts, homes and communities with great joy while reinvigorating fraternity and fellowship among you and enhancing everywhere unity and peace in and through you!

Faced with increasing threats to living peacefully together, we think it opportune to share some thoughts on how we, Christians and Sikhs, can promote human fraternity for harmony, peace and prosperity in the world.

Human fraternity determines the overall strength of humanity. It measures the health of relationships between people, at family, local, national and international level. As history attests, the bond of goodwill among people strengthens human solidarity. It fosters co-responsibility and forges human alliances for peace and prosperity. Hence, to help human relations stay healthy and hearty, we all have to play our part.

Our respective faith in God, as a loving Father, invites us to recognize, love and help the 'other' as a brother or a sister, since to love God and to love our neighbour are

two aspects of our life of faith. On the other hand, as the Bible says, if someone says, ‘I love God’ but hates his brother, he is a liar (Cf. Holy Bible, 1 Jn 4:20). In other words, a God-oriented person can only be happy by loving and being kind towards others (Cf. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 273). Indeed, our faith in God may only be measured by how much we love, respect, help and support our fellow beings, most especially the poor, the weak and the needy. It is no surprise that Guru Nanak ji called upon his adherents to follow this profound exhortation: “Let universal brotherhood be your highest religious aspiration” (*Guru Granth Sahib, Amritsar, 1604, Japu, Stanza 28, p. 6*).

Universal Fraternity is both richness and responsibility. As richness, it structures relationships within the ethical framework of treating life with dignity and sanctity as a God-given gift. It also helps us to treat the rights of all human beings with respect and sanity. As responsibility, it demands that we fulfil our duties towards others. This attitude of goodwill towards all is so necessary to help bring about world peace. In his message for the World Day of Peace, in 1971, Pope Paul VI said that, "Whoever works to educate the rising generation to believe that every man is our brother, is building peace from its very base." He added, “Where goodwill amongst men is at root disregarded, peace is at root destroyed” (Paul VI, *Message for the Celebration of the Day of Peace, 1 January, 1971*).

The promotion of human fraternity begins in the family, which is “the wellspring of fraternity” and “the foundation and the first pathway to peace” (Pope Francis, *Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 2014*). In the family, one can learn and pass on the values of mutual love and respect, fraternal caring and sharing, service and selfless self-giving. In a spirit of mutual acceptance and cooperation, the family can ensure the well-being of all peoples. “Peace and joy at home, peace and joy in the world around” (*Guru Granth Sahib, Amritsar, 1604, pp. 619, 1136*).

Religions too have an important role in nurturing fraternal relationships in families, communities, nations and in the wider world. Their role becomes even more crucial and beneficial when certain groups seek to divide people and tear apart the fabric of society. As believers, with shared convictions and concerns for the welfare of everybody (*sarbat da bhalaa*), may we, both Christians and Sikhs, strive to become “artisans of fraternity”. (Pope Francis, *Meeting with the Members of Higher Committee for achieving goals, contained in the Document on ‘Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together’ 11 Sept. 2019, Santa Marta, Rome*). Let us join hands with people of other religious traditions and with people of good will, in order to promote human fraternity everywhere!

Wishing you all once again a joyous Prakash Diwas of Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji!

Miguel Ángel Cardinal Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ President

Rev. Msgr. Indunil Kodithuwakku Janakarathne Kankanamalage Secretary

Mitzvah Day / World Day of the Poor

Mitzvah Day is now in its eleventh year. It is a day of faith-based social action that takes place in November and coincides with Inter Faith Week and World Day of the Poor. A Mitzvah is a commandment in Jewish law. It often means doing a good deed or an act of kindness, giving one's time, not money, to make a difference to the local community. It is an integral part of Jewish life. Since it started, as an international event, Mitzvah Day has sought to bring together people of all faiths and backgrounds to volunteer, side by side, on a variety of social action projects. This year, in the UK, over 25,000 people volunteered and 500 organizations took part up and down the country in a variety of projects. Here are a few that took place just in London.

At the Somali Centre in Finchley, five rabbis from four strands of Judaism (Orthodox, Reform, Liberal and Sephardi) joined Jewish and Muslim youth to plant bulbs for a local care home.

At the Al-Khoei Mosque in Queen's Park, Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis joined Muslim leaders to plant fig and apple trees as well as a variety of herbs, which have ritual significance to both faiths. The event was in tune with the "going greener" theme of the day. The Chief Rabbi was pleased that Mitzvah Day activities included people of different faiths. "This is what the world should be like all the time," he said. He also suggested that if Mitzvah Day can encourage people to perform good deeds round the year, then it would have reached its ultimate goal.

At the JW3 premises in Finchley Road, Labour, Tory and Lib Dem candidates joined a crowd of volunteers, from six different faiths, in a cooking workshop to provide kosher and halal-friendly meals for the homeless at a night shelter in Highgate. Many volunteers also wrapped presents for vulnerable children, registered as potential stem cell donors and turned old t-shirts into tote bags for charity.

Since 2017, Mitzvah Day has also coincided with the **World Day of the Poor**, which Pope Francis launched with these words, "Let us love, not with words but with deeds". This is exactly what 75 Children from Catholic and Jewish schools did on Thursday 14 November. They gathered for a day of interfaith encounter and charity, organized by Caritas Westminster and the Mitzvah Day teams. The students worked together at the parish hall of the Catholic church in Mill Hill to assemble 400 'Vinnie Packs', which the St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) initiated, to provide items of winter essentials for the homeless. The SVP distributes these packs to anybody who needs them across the UK. Some of the packs will go to the North London Synagogue Asylum Seeker Drop-In.

The event began with an "ice breaker" where the pupils discussed what items they thought rough sleepers would need in different countries and climates. They then worked on a production line, alternately preparing the goods and packing them. Siobhan Garibaldi from SVP ensured the day was a success by providing the materials and engaging with the pupils.

The day was the largest schools event for Mitzvah Day, with pupils from six Catholic Schools and three Jewish Schools taking part: St Joseph's Hendon, St Anthony's Schools for Girls, Bishop Challoner, Cardinal Pole, St Albert the Great, Pope Paul Catholic Primary School, JFS, Sacks Morasha and Etz Chaim.

In the Mass for World Day of the Poor, Pope Francis said "the poor reveal to us the riches that never grow old, that unite heaven and earth, the riches for which life is truly worth living: the riches of love". This sentiment was reflected throughout the day. Many Pupils even wrote heartfelt notes to include in the packs with words of compassion and encouragement showing how much they really cared:

"Dear receiver, this pack is complete with lots of stuff to keep you warm. I hope that you wake up feeling refreshed and with many people around you. Let the angels help you. – A person who cares"

"Dear reader, I hope this kit and letter brightens your day! Today has been the best day ever for you and me. Speak out, stay safe and good luck"

In congratulating everybody, Lady Daniela Pears, the Interfaith Chair for Mitzvah Day, wrote, "This was such a wonderful and beautifully run event! The happiness and energy in the room was so apparent. Well done everyone! I'm already looking forward to next time!"

Pope Francis also played his part in combining Mitzvah Day and World Day of the Poor. On Sunday, 17 November, he held a special Mass in St. Peter's Basilica for the poor. He then hosted a free lunch for over 1,500 poor, homeless and migrant people in the adjacent Paul VI Hall. Before lunch, the pope thanked all those present and asked God to bless them and their families. The menu for all the guests was lasagne, chicken with cream of mushroom sauce and potatoes, dessert, fruit and espresso coffee. Elsewhere in Rome, in several Catholic colleges, and in many parishes, another 1,500 needy people were also served lunch. A few days before, Pope Francis had a number of marquees erected in St Peter's square with many doctors and nurses offering free specialized medical services to those in need.

At the tree-planting event in North London, Dr Sheikh Ramzy of the Oxford Islamic Information Centre expressed his thoughts, which we can all share. He said, "It is important we celebrate each other's special days. This is very important for integration, for cohesion, because, after all, we are cousins". He felt that Mitzvah Day was very important for our children, because they can put all the hatred, all the difficulties away and come together. He added that every little counts. "This event maybe very small", he said, "but it still counts towards the world we cannot neglect. A thousand mile journey starts with the first step. Everybody has to do something. It's part of a bigger network which we are trying to do - and for the sake of peace."

May Inter Faith Week, Mitzvah Day and World Day of the Poor inspire us to work joyfully together and help us build a happy and united global family.

South London Interfaith Group

It is always a great pleasure to attend the South London Interfaith Group at the Friends Meeting House in Brixton. It meets on the last Thursday of every month, except December, when it meets just before Christmas. The meeting is always preceded by a tasty vegetarian lunch, usually prepared by Alan Gadd, the coordinator. Occasionally, one of the participants brings along something special we can all share. The meetings are always well attended and there is always something interesting to hear or talk about.

At the last meeting, there were about 30 present, representing a wide variety of faiths. Mohammed told us about a train crash in Pakistan, where over 70 people died. He asked for prayers, so we stopped for a moment of silence, where everyone prayed in their own way. Shanti had prepared a talk on climate change from a Hindu perspective. Her talk gave rise to a lot of discussion, including comments from members, who participated in recent demonstrations in London with Extinction Rebellion. Apparently there was an interfaith group, which took part and met at Lambeth Bridge. Sheila was on the wrong side of the bridge but found other Buddhists there, with whom she sat and meditated. One member of the group shared her experience of being arrested and discovered that members of the police force were supportive because they were worried for their children. A policeman interjected and tried to explain how difficult it was to monitor these demonstrations even when they were peaceful.

Maureen reminded us of the day conference she was planning on the inclusion of people with learning difficulties in places of worship. She still needed speakers from different faiths, but the event was progressing slowly. L'Arche was on board and was presenting a workshop. Diana reminded us of the Introducing Islam sessions with Chris Hewer in Richmond and elsewhere. We heard about many other interesting activities taking place. Most people made relevant comments on all the topics in a spirit of friendship and cooperation. Elizabeth told us about a letter she received from Amnesty International, which did not start with 'Dear Elizabeth' but 'Dear Fellow Human'. She liked that, but decided to sign the cheque she sent with her name.

It really is a joy to go along to these meetings, which have been taking place for about ten years in Brixton, but they started many years before at a different venue. I am sure and I hope similar interfaith encounters are happening all over the country. If not, they should be. I believe that these multi-faith encounters are very much in God's plan for humanity to help break down barriers between faiths and cultures and foster peace and friendship at a local level.

Thanks to Alan Gadd and Ivor Smith-Cameron, who started these meetings many years ago. May they continue to grow and bear many fruits.

Inter Faith Week 2019

Inter Faith Week (10-17 November) was yet again a great success. More than 650 activities took place in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Many thousands of people of different backgrounds and all ages took part. The Co-Chairs of the Inter Faith Network (IFN), Jatinder Singh Birdi and Bishop Jonathan Clark said: *“This has been a fantastic Week. It has showcased the contribution faith communities make to society, helped increase inter faith understanding and sparked new conversations. We have been delighted to see so many local initiatives and also many organisations getting involved for the first time. At this time so often characterised by division, it has been very good to witness people coming together in such a positive way. There are key values that we share and Inter Faith Week provides a chance to envision ways that we can all draw on them to strengthen our common life and to work together to address such issues as climate change, homelessness, and hate crime”*.

Churches, gurdwaras, mandirs, mosques, synagogues, temples, viharas, schools, universities and colleges, sports grounds, parks, council chambers, museums, galleries, libraries, community centres, hospitals, hospices, workplaces and online platforms have been the location of an amazing range of activities. These included celebrations; faith trails; cultural activities; dialogues; volunteering to help local communities; Remembrance events; conferences and talks; tree plantings and litter picks; classroom activities; theatre productions; poetry readings; food festivals; sports tournaments; events linked both to the Week and Mitzvah Day (17 November) and more. The environment and the climate crisis featured strongly. Details of events can be seen at www.interfaithweek.org/map

The Inter-faith Council for Wales organised a special event with the support of the Welsh Government. It began with a candlelit walk through Cardiff, and included a speech from Deputy Minister Jane Hutt AM. The Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum and the Belfast Branch of the Council of Christians and Jews jointly hosted a multi faith discussion on ‘Religious perspectives on Culture, Community and Censorship’.

Respect and friendship are at the heart of Inter Faith Week, which coincided this year with Anti-Bullying Week. For Friendship Friday – on the eve of the Week – IFN was invited by anti-bullying charity Kidscape to provide a guest blog with pointers for parents and carers of primary school children about the importance of faith and belief, and respectful engagement in primary school contexts.

In the course of Inter Faith Week, IFN launched a new primary school resource to help increase pupils’ understanding of, and skills for, inter faith encounter, dialogue and action. It is aimed at ages 9-11. It focuses on learning about real examples of inter faith engagement and is available free of charge at <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/learning-about-inter-faith-activity-a-primary-resource>

WCF Goes On The Road

It was good to read the September Newsletter of World Congress of Faiths (WCF), about their recent visits to places of worship, partly because I was hoping to attend, but also because there were plenty of pictures to highlight the visits.

During the summer, WCF members visited three places of worship. On 30 July, they went to the Fo Guang Shan Temple in London for a Tea ceremony. On 21 August, a group went to Cambridge to the recently opened “ecomosque”; and, later that day, to the Brahma Kumaris Centre, by the River Cam.

I have attended a number of Tea Ceremonies at the Temple and enjoyed them all. They have been moments of peace and tranquillity, while savouring excellent tea. If you have not experienced a Tea Ceremony in a Buddhist Temple before, I highly recommend it. The ceremony can take one hour or several hours, but it is an excellent way to unwind and relax, especially if you have an active and busy lifestyle. I was hoping to attend this one as well, but we were out of the country at the time.

I would have liked to visit the new Central Mosque in Cambridge, which is apparently Europe’s first ‘eco-mosque’. I looked it up on their website. It is a stunning building built on traditional Islamic designs using state of the art technologies for heating, lighting and washing giving it a near-zero carbon footprint. There is also a beautiful Islamic garden with a grove of trees leading up to the entrance, “*offering a fragrant reminder of Paradise amid the bustle of the city*” as the website informs us.

Later that day, WCF visited the Brahma Kumaris Centre, where they enjoyed participating in the celebration of Raksha Bandan, which falls at the August full moon. Raksha Bandhan literally means ‘the bond of protection’, and is symbolized by the Rakkhi, a string tied around the right wrist. This has its origin in ancient times, when a virgin woman (often a sister) would give this to a warrior going into battle to protect him from harm.

I am so glad WCF wrote about their experiences of visiting places of worship. Their ‘on the road’ programme reminds me of our own annual multi-faith pilgrimages for peace, where we visit about five places of worship of different faiths during the course of one day and usually spend about one hour in each place, where the welcome is always warm and amazing.

Over the years, we have visited so many places all over London and surroundings. Every year, we go to a different area and rarely go back to an area for about ten years. Even when we do revisit an area, we do not necessarily go to the same places. Indeed, we often discover that there are new places of worship in that area, or old ones that have been taken over by a new group. It shows how rich London and surroundings are in faith and cultures. Our faith communities are increasing every year. We need to reach out to them and make them welcome.

On Saturday 6th June 2020, Westminster Interfaith is planning to revisit the Borough of Ealing for its 35th Annual Multi-Faith Pilgrimage for Peace and Friendship. We made a short visit to West Ealing in 2010, Southall in 2011, but have not spent the day there since 1996!

Miscellaneous

Interfaith Photo Competition

Share your photographs with us and take part in the re-publication of our interfaith reader *Transcendence: Prayer of People of Faith*.

Transcendence is a collection of about 140 prayers and readings coming from a wide selection of world faiths collected under the themes of Transcendence, Presence, Light, Creation, Providence, Praise, Union, Compassion, Peace, Life Eternal, One Earth.

Westminster Interfaith is bringing out a revised edition in 2021 and invites you to send in your best photographs about *Interfaith / My Faith / Religions of the World*. The winning images are going to be included in the new edition, all winners will be acknowledged by name and receive a free copy of the book.

E-mail your entries to: westminsterinterfaith@rcdow.org.uk;

NB you must be the author of the images. Multiple entries are welcome.

Join the
Big Sleep Out
Saturday Night
7th December 2019
Trafalgar Square
Oval Cricket Ground

website <https://www.bigsleepout.com/>

Focolare Advent Reflection
Saturday 7th December 2-4pm
Corpus Christi Church Hall,
11 Trent Road, Brixton SW2 5BJ

Bring Food to Share
All Welcome!

Caribbean Carol Concert
Friday 13 December 8.30 –10pm
Holy Redeemer
Italian Mission
20 Brixton Road SW9 6BU

Bring Food to Share
All Welcome!

Westminster Cathedral
Interfaith Group

Every 3rd Wednesday 4-5pm

15 January Sr Emmanuel Bac Nguyen on
“The challenges and hopes for the Church in
Vietnam”

19 February Zionist and Jewish speakers
return to consider how we can help the Is-
rael/Palestine situation

See page 22 for contact details

Visit to Lebanon

4 – 13 May 2020

Encounter with history, culture, faith

Led by Revd Andrew Ashdown

Contact ***Christians Aware*** for details

Date for the Diary

35th Annual All-Day
Multi-Faith Pilgrimage For
Peace and Friendship

Saturday 6th June 2020

9am-6pm

in Borough of Ealing

Courses, Contacts and Events

For courses and events, contact the relevant organization directly or check their website. Most events are free. Some ask for donations towards expenses. It is best to register online.

Inter Faith Network UK

2 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0DH
Tel: +44 (0)20 7730 0410
Email: ifnet@interfaith.org.uk
Web: <https://www.interfaith.org.uk>;

Faiths Forum for London

62 Grosvenor Street, London, W1K 3JF
Telephone Number: 0207 7240823
Website: www.faithsforum4london.org

Ammerdown Conference Retreat Centre

Ammerdown Park, Radstock, Bath, Somerset
BA3 5SWT: T: 01761 433709
E: info@ammerdown.org;
centre@ammerdown.org;

View **2020 AMMERDOWN COURSES** on website www.ammerdown.org/courses or contact Tina Hartnell by phone or email

Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter

34 Chepstow Villas, W11 2QZ
Tel: 020 7727 3597 / 020 7313 8286
E: sioncentrefordialogue@gmail.com;
Web: www.sioncentre.org;

London Interfaith Centre

125 Salusbury Rd London NW6 6RG
<http://londoninterfaith.org.uk/> Enquiries to info@londoninterfaith.org.uk

Christian Muslim Marriage Support Group

Contact Rosalind or Heather confidentially through the inter faith marriage website:
www.interfaithmarriage.org.uk;
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/185782491456844/>

Westminster Cathedral Interfaith Group

Meets 3rd Wednesday of the month 4-5pm in Hinsley Room, Morpeth Terrace, SW1P 1QN
From Westminster Cathedral Piazza, bear right past St Paul's bookshop and the school to a fenced garden between the playing fields.

15 Jan Sr Emmanuel Bac Nguyen on "The challenges and hopes for the Church in Vietnam"

19 Feb Zionist and Jewish speakers return to consider how we can help the Israel/Palestine situation

18 March Revd Alan Gadd on his interfaith work
Text John Woodhouse on 0790 8888 586 or
Email: woodhousesopten@btinternet.com

Central London Inter Faith Meetup

Westminster Quaker Meeting House,
52 St Martins Lane WC2 N 4EA
Every Friday from 6.50pm website: <https://www.meetup.com/Central-London-Inter-Faith-Meetup>

Drop In Silence, 5.30-7pm

Details: DropInSilence.org;

Marylebone Scriptural Reasoning

Contact: marylebonesr@gmail.com;

St Ethelburga's Centre

78 Bishopsgate, London EC2N 4AG; T:020 7496 1610 www.stethelburgas.org;
E: tent@stethelburgas.org

See events page on their website

Pax Christi

St Joseph's, Watford Way,
London NW4 4TY
Pat Gaffney, T: 0208 203 4884
E: info@paxchristi.org.uk
www.paxchristi.org.uk;

South London Inter Faith Group

12.30pm Lunch meeting on last Thursday of the month at **Streatham Friends Meeting House, Redlands Way, Roupell Park Estate, Brixton Hill, SW2 3LU**
E: secretary@southlondoninterfaith.org.uk

North London Interfaith Group

Meets monthly to discuss questions in the news about faith, festivities and practices of other faiths. Contact: Sr Elizabeth: 020 7272 8048;
E: eodonohoe@btinternet.com;

Christians Aware

2 Saxby Street, Leicester LE2 0ND
T: 0116 254 0770
eliam@christiansaware.co.uk
www.christiansaware.co.uk

Visit to Lebanon 4 – 13 May 2020

Encounter with history, culture, faith, *led by Revd Andrew Ashdown*

Contacts, Courses and Events

The Faith & Belief Forum

Formerly 3 FF (Three Faiths Forum)

Contact Director, Phil Champain,
3FF, Star House, 104 Grafton Road,
London NW5 4BA

London Peace Pagoda Battersea Park

Contact: Rev. G. Nagase
Tel: 020 7228 9620 Email:
londonpeacepagoda@outlook.com

Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist Temple

Brickhill St, Willen Lake,
Milton Keynes MK15 0BG
T: 01908 663 652;
E: mkpeacepagoda@gmail.com

InterFaith MK (Milton Keynes)

c/o 3 Ayr Way,
Milton Keynes, Bucks, MK3 7SJ
Contact: David Rennie 01908 366280
E: interfaithmk@gmail.com
Website: www.interfaithmk.org.uk

Ham Faithful Friends

Contact: Diana Mills
dianamills@phonecoop.coop

Kensington Council of Churches

Chris Luxton, chrislfriends@aol.com;

Benedictine Institute

info@benedictine-institute.org

Hounslow Friends of Faith

www.hounslowfriendsoffaith.org
<info@hounslowfriendsoffaith.org>

Welwyn Hatfield Inter Faith Group

www.whifgroup.co.uk;

Focolare Centre for Unity

69 Parkway, Welwyn Garden City AL8 6JG
E: cfu@focolare.org.uk
T: 01707 323 620

Grassroots - Luton Council of Faiths

47 High Town Road,
Luton, Beds, LU2 0BW
T: 01582 416946
admingrassroots@btconnect.com

St Martin-in-the-Fields

Trafalgar Square London WC2N 4JJ
www.smitf.org

Gandhi Foundation

Contact: William Rhind,
william@gandhifoundation.org
Website: www.gandhifoundation.org

The Islamic College

133 High Road, London NW10 2SW
+44 (0) 20 8451 9993
info@islamic-college.ac.uk

Woolf Institute

Wesley House, Jesus Lane,
Cambridge CB5 8BJ
T:01223 741038 www.woolf.camb.ac.uk

Multi-Faith Centre (MFC)

University of Derby
T:01332 591285; E: mfc@derby.ac.uk

Brahma Kumaris

Global Co-operation House,
65-69 Pound Lane, London NW10 2HH

Westminster Synagogue and Scrolls Museum

**Kent House, Rutland Gardens,
London SW7 1BX**

T:020 7584 3953

secretary@westminstersynagogue.org;
W: www.westminstersynagogue.org;

Wolverhampton Interfaith

T: 01902 427 601
E: admin@ifwton.org.uk;
For up-to-date details, check website:
<http://ifwton.org.uk/diary.html>

World Congress of Faiths

W: www.worldfaiths.org;

St Albans cathedral,

St Albans Herts AL1 1BY
01727890205 Contact: Caroline Godden
alo@stalbanscathedral.org
www.stalbanscathedral.org

Calendar of Religious Festivals

- 1 December** **FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT** *Christian (Western Churches)* Advent means ‘coming’. It marks the start of the Christian liturgical year, when the writings of a different evangelist are read. This year will be the year of Matthew.
- Advent is a time to reflect on the incarnation and to prepare for the birth anniversary of Jesus, traditionally celebrated on 25 December. Some churches celebrate each Sunday by lighting the first candle on the advent crown—a circular wreath of greenery. A further 3 candles are lit on subsequent Sundays, culminating with the Christmas candle on 25 December.
- Some Christians fast during Advent in preparation for the birth of Jesus. In many Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches, Advent lasts for 40 days, starting on 15 November. It is called the Nativity Fast, when no meat or dairy food are allowed.
- 8 December** **BODHI DAY** *Buddhist* Some Buddhists (e.g. Pure Land followers) celebrate Gautama’s attainment of Enlightenment on this day under the Bodhi tree in Bodhi Gaya, North India.
- 8 December** **IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY** *Christian (Roman Catholic)* celebrates the doctrine that Mary was born free from Original Sin, leaving her sinless for the conception and bearing of Jesus.
- 10 December** **HUMAN RIGHTS DAY** *(National)* In 1948 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: ‘All human beings are born with equal and inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms’.
- 21 December** **YULE** *Wiccan Pagan* **WINTER SOLSTICE** *Druid* The sun is reborn; the return of new life. Yule is often celebrated for 12 nights and days from the evening before the Winter Solstice (called Mother’s night), when they think of their female ancestors and spiritual protectors.
- 23-30 December** **CHANUKAH** *Jewish* Festival of Lights celebrates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after it was recaptured from the Syrian Greeks by the Maccabee brothers in about 162 BCE. For the eight evenings of the festival, a candle is lit each evening from right to left in a *hanukkiyah*, a nine-branched *menorah*. The ninth candle is the *shamash* (the servant candle) from which the other candles are lit. Foods cooked with oil, such as doughnuts and *latkes* (potato cakes) are traditional. It is to remember the miracle of the small phial of oil that kept the Temple lights burning so many years ago. A game of *dreidel*, a special small spinning top, is popular with children to commemorate ‘the great miracle that happened’.
- 24 December** **CHRISTMAS EVE** *Christian* Carols, crib services and Midnight Mass inaugurate the festival of Christmas.
- 25 December** **CHRISTMAS DAY** *Christian* celebrates the birth of Jesus, whom Christians believe to be the son of God become man, “the Word was made Flesh” (John 1:1-18). Gifts are given as reminders of the gifts brought to the infant Jesus. Christmas carols, plays and evergreens are associated with this time. Nativity sets are displayed in many churches and homes.
- 26 December** **ST STEPHEN’S DAY** *Christian* First Christian martyr. Bank Holiday in UK and Commonwealth and called **BOXING DAY**. Traditionally a day for giving gifts especially to employees.

- 26 December** **ZARATOSHT NO DISO** *Zoroastrian (Iranian)* **24 May (Parsi - Shenshai)** commemorates the death anniversary of the Prophet Zarathushtra. Tradition records that this is when he was assassinated at the age of 77. It is customary to visit the Fire Temple, participate in special remembrance prayers to him and to the *Fravashis* (the guardian spirits of departed ancestors), and ponder upon the *Gathas* (Hymns) of Zarathushtra, which embody his message to humanity.
- 31 December** **OMISOKA** *Japanese* Preparation for New Year by cleansing Shinto home shrines and Buddhist altars. The bells of Buddhist temples are struck 108 times to warn against the 108 evils to be overcome.
- 31 December** **HOGMANAY / NEW YEAR'S EVE AND NEW YEAR'S DAY** *National Celebrations* go on till next day, especially in Scotland, where bagpipes, haggis and first footing are widespread. Firework displays in many places. It is customary to make New Year Resolutions.
- 1 January** **GANJITSU** *Japanese* New Year's Day celebrations sometimes last three days. Businesses are closed and the first visit of the year is paid to local Shinto shrines.
- 1 January** **THE NAMING AND THE CIRCUMCISION OF JESUS** *Christian* This day celebrates the circumcision or naming of Jesus at eight days old in accordance with Jewish custom.
- 1 January** **SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD** *Christian* A week after Christmas, Christians honour Mary, mother of Jesus, with the title of Mother of God. On this day, the Pope delivers a message for World Peace.
- 2 January** **BIRTHDAY OF GURU GOBIND SINGH (1666 CE)** *Sikh (Bakrami Calendar)* In 1675, at the age of 9, he became the tenth Sikh Guru on his father's death. He was the last of the ten human Sikh Gurus. He instituted the 5 Ks and founded the Order of Khalsa on the feast of Baisakhi, 1699 The day is referred to as a *Gurpurb*, and is marked by the ending of an *akhand path*, an unbroken reading of the whole Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Book.
- 6 January** **EPIPHANY** *Christian* 12th day of Christmas. Celebrates the manifestation of Jesus to the world represented by the *magi* or wise men, who brought the infant Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.
- 6 January** **THEOPHANY / BAPTISM OF CHRIST** *Christian (Orthodox Julian date: 19 January)* At the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, the heavens were opened and a voice was heard proclaiming Jesus, while God's spirit descended on him in the form of a dove. During this event God was manifest as three persons in one – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. 'Theophany' means 'Manifestation of God'. The first miracle of Jesus, at Cana in Galilee, is also remembered at this time.
- 6/7 January** **CHRISTMAS EVE AND DAY** *Christian (Eastern Orthodox/Armenian, Ethiopian, Rastafarian: Julian calendar)*; Many Eastern churches and Rastafarians use the Julian, rather than the Gregorian Calendar. Accordingly they celebrate Christmas and other fixed festivals 13 days after the Western churches, so that the 6th and 7th of January in the Orthodox calendar equate to the 24th and 25th December in the West.
- 5 or 12 January** **ANNUAL METHODIST COVENANT SERVICE** *Christian* The service has Puritan origins and dates back to the time of John Wesley. He saw the relationship with God in a Covenant with his people as being like a marriage between human beings on the one side, and with God in Christ on the other .

- 12 January BIRTHDAY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA** *Hindu* Born Narendra Nath Datta in 1902 in Calcutta, he was an Indian Hindu monk who became the chief disciple of the 19th century saint Ramakrishna. Vivekananda, as he became known, was a key figure in the introduction of the Indian philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga to the Western world and helped to develop Hinduism during the latter part of the 19th century. He pioneered the development of the Ramakrishna Mission and the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre movement in India and throughout the world.
- 12 January BAPTISM OF CHRIST (Anglican) BAPTISM OF THE LORD (RC) Christian** recalls how, at Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, the heavens opened and a voice was heard proclaiming Jesus, while God's Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove. During this event God was manifest as three persons in one: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus' first miracle at the marriage feast of Cana is also remembered.
- 13 January BIRTHDAY OF GURU GOBIND SINGH (Nanakshahi Calendar) Sikh** See 2 January
- 13/14 January MAKAR SANKRANTI / PONGAL / LOHRI** *Hindu* Sankranti is the start of a new zodiac sign. Tamils celebrate Pongal and eat a rice dish which gives the festival its name. A day for almsgiving and patching up quarrels and disagreements. Punjabis (including some Sikhs) celebrate the day as Lohri. Fires are lit outside and peanuts and sesame sweets are eaten round them.
- 16 January SHINRAN MEMORIAL DAY** *Buddhist* Shinran Shonin (1173-1262) was the founder of Jodo Shin-shu, school of Pure Land Buddhism.
- 18-25 January WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY** *Christian* started in 1908 and runs from the Confession of Peter (Jan 18) to the Conversion of Paul (Jan 25). The theme for 2019 '*Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue*' (Deut.16:18-20) was prepared by the churches of Indonesia. The resources highlight issues of economic injustice and how religious pluralism can face challenges in the face of radicalisation.
- 19 January WORLD RELIGION DAY** *Baha'i and other faiths* promotes interfaith understanding by emphasizing factors common to all faiths. First introduced among Baha'i communities in the 1950s, it is now celebrated by a wider spread of communities on the third Sunday of January
- 21 Jan THEOPHANY / BAPTISM OF CHRIST** *Christian (Orthodox)* see 6 January
- 21 January HONEN MEMORIAL DAY** *Buddhist* Honen (1133-1212 CE) was the founder of Jodo Shinshu, one of the schools of Pure Land Buddhism.
- 25 January CHINESE NEW YEAR / SPRING FESTIVAL / CHUNJIE / YUAN TAN** *Chinese* Celebrations can last three or more days. 2019 is Year of the **Rat**.
- 25 Jan LOSAR** *Buddhist* Tibetan New Year festival.
- 27 January HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY** *National* A day to remember all those who suffered and died at the hands of the Nazis during 2nd World War, and to help ensure that no such atrocity happens again. Anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau.
- 29/30 January SARASWATI PUJA/ VASANT PANCHAMI** *Hindu* **BASANT** *Sikh (Punjabi)* The Festival marks the beginning of Spring. In eastern India, especially in Bengal, Hindus venerate Saraswati, the goddess of learning and the arts. Yellow is associated with the festival and so *murtis* of Saraswati are dressed in yellow. Another (secular) tradition is kite-flying, especially in Lahore.

- 30 January** **JASHN-E SADEH** *Zoroastrian (Iranian)* A mid-winter festival, celebrated 50 days before the advent of the spring NoRuz. It is customary to pay visits to the Fire Temple to give thanks to the Creator God, and with a bonfire after sunset.
- 31 Jan** **BIRTHDAY OF GURU HAR RAI** *Sikh* He is 7th Sikh Guru.
- 1 February** **IMBOLC / CANDLEMAS** *Pagan* celebrates the awakening of the land and the growing power of the Sun. Snowdrops are seen as the heralds of spring.
- 2 February** **THE PRESENTATION OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE** (*Christian*) Often called **Candlemas** because lighted candles are held during service.
- 3 February** **SETSUBUN / BEAN SCATTERING** (*Japanese*) Mid-winter celebration, when harshness of winter is over and days are getting longer.
- 8 February** **LANTERN FESTIVAL / YUANXIAOJIE / TENG CHIEH** *Chinese* marks the first full moon of the year and the lengthening of the days. Strings of lanterns in various designs are hung out as decorations.
- 8 (15) February** **PARINIRVANA** *Buddhist* marks the final passing of Gautama Buddha at Kushinagara, India. Pure Land Buddhists refer to it as *Nirvana Day*
- 9 February** **MAGHA PUJA** *Buddhist* This festival commemorates two occasions, one that took place in the month of Magha, seven weeks after the Buddha's enlightenment, when he taught his companions the Four Noble Truths; the other occasion was 45 years later, when 1,250 enlightened personal disciples of the Buddha came to the Bamboo Grove at Rajagaha on the full moon of Magha (usually in late February or early March). This was one of the earliest large gatherings of Buddhists. On that day, the Buddha taught the main principles of the *Dhamma* and set out his teachings to the assembled *arahats* (enlightened monks) for them to learn and follow.
- 10 February** **TU B'SHEVAT** *Jewish* A popular minor festival which celebrates the New Year for trees. Jewish tradition marks the 15th of Shevat as the day when the sap in the trees begins to rise, heralding the beginning of spring. It is customary for Jews all over the world to plant young trees at this time and to eat fruit produced in Israel. For religious accounting purposes all trees have their anniversaries on this festival, regardless of when they were planted.
- 21 February** **MAHASHIVRATRI** (Great Shiva Night) *Hindu* Every night of the new moon is dedicated to Shiva, but on this night, Shiva is said to perform the cosmic dance, leading from creation to destruction. Many Hindus fast. Milk and honey are poured on his symbol, *lingam*.
- 25 February** **SHROVE TUESDAY** *Christian (Western Churches)* is the day before the start of Lent. Traditionally, a day for repentance in preparation for Lent ('shrive' means to receive or make confession). Pancakes were made to use up rich foods, such as butter and eggs. In parts of the world people celebrate Mardi Gras by holding carnivals.
- 26 February** **ASH WEDNESDAY** *Christian (Western Churches)* The first day of Lent when Christians remember the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness. In many churches, services are held where the worshipper's forehead is marked with a cross of ash.
- 26 February to 11 April** **LENT** *Christian (Western Churches)* A period of 40 days leading up to Easter—a time of fasting and discipline. Christians give up something during this time to mark the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness.

- 1 March ST DAVID'S DAY** *Christian* National Patron saint of Wales, who lived in the 6th century CE. As monk, abbot and bishop he helped to spread Christianity among the Celtic tribes of western Britain.
- 5 March GREAT LENTEN FAST/THE FIRST DAY** *Christian (Orthodox)* The Lenten Fast involves abstinence from meat, fish and dairy products until Easter. Eastern Churches start Lent on the *Monday* before the first Sunday of Lent.
- 3 March HINAMATSURI / DOLLS' FESTIVAL / GIRLS' DAY** *Japanese* Clay dolls representing the Emperor and Empress, are displayed in the home with offerings of peach blossom, rice-wine and rice-cakes. The dolls are intended to carry away any illness affecting the daughters of the house. Prayers are said for daughters to grow up to be healthy and dutiful.
- 6 March WOMEN'S WORLD DAY OF PRAYER** *Christian* This international, interdenominational prayer movement began in 1887. A different country produces the material each year. In 2020 the theme is 'Rise, Take Your Mat, and Walk'. The material has been prepared by Christian women in Zimbabwe.
- 9-10 March PURIM - FESTIVAL OF LOTS** *Jewish* celebrates the saving of the Jewish community of Persia, retold in the Book of Esther (the *Megillah*) and read twice in the synagogue. The name of Haman is drowned out with rattles and hooters by the congregation whenever it is read. *Hamantashen* (cakes filled with poppy seeds) are made and eaten at this time.
- 11-20 March FRAVARDIGAN / MUKTAD** *Zoroastrian* the festival of the *fravashis*, commences ten days before NoRuz and is the last festival of the old year. *Fravashis*, (guardian spirits of departed ancestors), are welcomed by name by the Zoroastrian *Mobeds* or *Magi* (priests).

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IGNORANCE

The young disciple was such a prodigy that scholars from everywhere sought his advice and marvelled at his learning.

When the Governor was looking for an advisor, he came to the Master and said, "Tell me is it true that the young man knows as much as they say he does?"

"Truth to tell." said the Master wryly, "the fellow reads so much I don't see how he could ever find the time to know anything."

From:
'One Minute
Wisdom'
by
Anthony de Mello
SJ.
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