



INTER FAITH

UPDATE

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Inside this issue

Network News	2
National Update	3
Regional Update	10
Inter Faith Profile	11
International Update	13
Diary Dates	15

UK faiths criticise French ban on religious symbols in schools

UK faith communities have expressed concern over the passing of a law by the French Government on 10 February banning the wearing of religious clothing and symbols in state schools. The ban has been under consideration for some time.

Representatives of the Muslim and Sikh communities have made their strong views against the ban clear at meetings with French officials in Paris and in London at the French Embassy, highlighting how their communities will be affected by the ban. There have been demonstrations against it in

London outside the French Embassy and in Paris.

In recent weeks several faith leaders including the Archbishop of Canterbury have made statements urging the French Government to re-consider the ban.

Speaking at a reception hosted by the Muslim community in December Home Office Minister Fiona Mactaggart said, "Britishness today is not homogeneous. It is evolving and is as rich as the different people in Britain. British Muslims have consistently shown how it

(Continued on page 3)

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Home Office Review Report Completed

As reported in Issue 22 of *Inter Faith Update*, the new Faith Communities Unit set up in the Home Office has been taking forward the Government's review of the patterns of its consultation with faith communities and their representation at national events. The Steering Group for the Review, chaired by the Home Office Minister, Ms Fiona Mactaggart, approved the terms of its report at its fourth meeting on 2 February. There have been eight meetings of the Working Group. Both of these two Groups included representatives of Government Departments and of faith communities.

The report will review existing arrangements for consultation between individual Government Departments and faith communities and set out "good practice" guidelines on this; make recommendations to faith communities on how to make the consultation process with central Government more effective; look at consultation by central Government at regional and local level; review arrangements for the representation of faith communities at national events; and consider the adequacy of existing central machinery for consultation between Government and faith communities. It is anticipated that the report will be published towards the end of March.



NETWORK NEWS

Meeting Of Faith Communities Consultative Forum

Issue 22 of *Inter Faith Update* reported the first meeting of the Faith Communities Consultative Forum established within the framework of the Network. This has evolved from earlier meetings of faith community representative bodies in Network membership.

At a meeting of the Forum in London on 1 December, Ms Fiona Mactaggart, the Home Office Minister with responsibility for faith community matters, offered her reflections on the Home Office Review of the Government's engagement with faith communities. She said that "the development of a closer relationship between central Government and faith communities has been a learning experience for both sides. The Government wants to have a closer engagement with faith communities which bring together large numbers of citizens who have an important contribution to make to society". She said that the setting up within the Home Office of a Faith Communities Unit, taken together with the recent Review, were designed to help this process. She added that "the Government expects the views of faith communities to be expressed with candour. Consultation does not always lead to agreement and there will be disagreement from time to time between Government and faith communities on some issues. It is quite right for these disagreements to be clearly expressed,

whether from the perspective of faith communities or of the Government. Effective consultation machinery needs to make people feel safe in expressing their views robustly to one another." She emphasised the need for mechanisms whereby the voices of women and of young people in faith communities can be heard better. She spoke of the joy of representing, as MP for Slough, a richly diverse local community and said that her practical experience as MP for this constituency had underlined for her the importance of personal encounter and action at a local level and informed the way she was approaching her work as a Minister.

The meeting also heard a presentation from Debbie Gupta of the Women and Equality Unit in the Department for Trade and Industry on the process for drawing up the Government's White Paper on the proposed Commission for Equality and Human Rights, and considered the report published last June by the House of Lords Select Committee on Religious Offences and the Home Office's response to this, which had just been published.

More on these issues will be found on page 6.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK

The Inter Faith Network was founded in 1987. It works with its member bodies to promote good relations between the faith communities in the UK, to combat inter religious prejudice and intolerance and to help make the UK a country marked by mutual understanding and respect between religions where all can practise their faith with integrity. The Network:

- Provides information on faith communities and on inter faith affairs
- Advises on multi faith projects and inter faith issues
- Publishes materials to aid work in the religious and inter faith sectors
- Fosters inter faith co-operation on social issues
- Holds regular meetings where social and religious questions of concern to the different faith communities can be examined together
- Links over 90 member organisations including: representative bodies from the different faith communities; inter faith organisations; local inter faith groups; educational and academic bodies

NATIONAL UPDATE

(Continued from page 1)

is possible to be British, Muslim and proud. There has been a long running controversy in France both within the state education system and nationally about symbols and the role of faith in a secular society. This is a debate we had a long time ago, and with our very different traditions and with sensitivity displayed by all faiths, we have been able to find within our own culture a way of celebrating diversity without controversy."

In a written statement in February, Foreign Office Minister Mike O'Brien said "In Britain we are comfortable with the expression of religion. Integration does not require assimilation."

The Network's National Meeting in London on 28 June will have as its theme "Inter faith relations: the UK in Europe".

In England and Wales school governing bodies are responsible for deciding on policy on school uniforms. But the advice of the Department for Education and Skills to school governors is that it is not appropriate "that any pupil should be disciplined for non-compliance with a school uniform policy which results from them having to adhere to a particular cultural, race or religious dress code."

There have been two cases in separate schools in Luton this year over items of clothing worn by Muslim students being banned by the head teachers concerned. In one case, involving the *hijab* (headscarf), the ban was quickly reversed by the school's governors. The other case, involving the *jilbab* (ankle length robe) is to be the subject of a court hearing.

Visit The Inter Faith Network's web site at: www.interfaith.org.uk

Holocaust Memorial Day

Northern Ireland hosted the UK's 4th Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) Commemoration which took place at Belfast's Waterfront Hall on 27 January. As 2004 is the 10th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda which resulted in the deaths of up to a million people, the HMD theme for 2004 was 'From the Holocaust to Rwanda; lessons learned, lessons still to learn'.

HMD events took place around the country and many of these involved different faith groups. Some had active involvement from local inter faith organisations. For example, a service hosted by Rochester Cathedral was held in conjunction with the town's inter faith group and in Leicester the Mayor attended a multi cultural evening organised by the Leicester Council of Faiths. Among religious events with an HMD theme was BBC R4's Sunday Worship programme on 28 February which came from the West London Synagogue where Rabbi Mark Winer shared his pulpit with the Anglican Bishop of London, Richard Chartres.

Details of the national commemoration and many local events can be found on the official HMD website: <http://www.holocaustmemorialday.gov.uk>

CCJ Statement

The Joint Presidents of the Council of Christians and Jews issued a statement on 27 January, Holocaust Memorial Day, condemning anti-Semitism and the "politics of hate" in all its forms. In the statement, they note that the good relations between Britain's Christian and Jewish leaders have helped set the tone for tolerance and respectful diversity more widely. Their statement celebrates the contribution of the international Jewish community to "the conversation of mankind" and speaks of the calling of Jews and

Christians, as well as other faith communities, to work towards achieving dignity and respect for all people. The Presidents note, however, a resurgence in Europe and around the world of attacks on Jewish people, and call on others to join their pledge not to permit anti-Semitism to “stain our continent’s future as it has our past”. This involves the rejection of all forms of racism, prejudice and xenophobia as well as “the misuse of religion and religious language” in political argument. The statement also includes the expression of a deep longing for justice, peace and reconciliation in the Holy Land. For the full text see <http://www.ccj.org.uk>.

Figures released some days later by the Jewish Community Security Trust showed that 2003 saw the second highest annual figure for anti-Semitic incidents in Britain since records began in 1984. For 2003 the number of incidents was 375, up by 7% on the previous year, which was itself 15% higher than in 2001.

The Passion of the Christ

A private screening of *The Passion of the Christ*, a controversial new film directed by Mel Gibson took place some days before its general release begins on 1 March. The portrayal of the Jewish authorities of Jesus’ time in the film has caused deep disquiet among members of the Jewish community. It has prompted fears that decades of inter faith work aimed at countering anti-Judaism will be undermined. Some Christians have welcomed the film although others have criticised it for drawing on dubious non-Biblical sources.

Attacks on places of worship

Attacks on churches, gurdwaras, mosques, synagogues and temples have occurred in a number of areas in the last few months. Among these was an attack on the Sri Ram Mandir in Wembley on 25 October, the day of Diwali, when a young intruder grabbed the microphone

and began abusing Hindu beliefs and deities. The other intruder lifted the consecrated statue of Ram and threw it to the ground, breaking its arm. The perpetrators, who claimed to be acting in the name of a Christian group, were arrested and charged but were in one case only fined £400 and in the other jailed for 4 months. The Hindu-Christian Forum issued a statement at the start of January deploring this situation, affirming respect for each other’s faith, and asking the Government to provide full protection to places of worship and to amend the law so that people who carry out such acts can be more adequately punished.

The Director of Public Prosecutions, Ken Macdonald QC, met with members of the local Hindu community after the court case was concluded to discuss the basis for the charges the prosecution had opted to pursue. Following a meeting between the Director of Public Prosecutions, some of the CPS’ policy staff and representatives from the Hindu community the CPS has agreed to hold twice-yearly discussions with them and to appoint an independent Hindu adviser to the London Criminal Justice Board.

CPS consults on racist and religiously motivated crime

Issue 22 of *Inter Faith Update* reported on the new policy statement on racist and religiously motivated crime by the Crown Prosecution Service. People from minority ethnic communities and faith communities across the North West region were consulted about racist and religiously motivated crime at a conference hosted by the Crown Prosecution Service on 10 January. The five CPS North West Areas (Cheshire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cumbria) issued an open invitation to minority ethnic and faith communities in their areas to come along to the event to find out about the prosecution of these crimes and to give their opinions on the new policy.

The CPS policy document can be found at <http://www.cps.gov.uk/home/PressArchive/121-03.htm>.



The latest CPS Racist Incident Monitoring Scheme Report (RIMS) is due to be published in the next two months. For the first time this annual report will include a section on religiously aggravated offences (based on finalised cases completed between 14 December 2001, when the new offences were introduced, and 31 March 2003). Cases completed from 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 will be covered in a report later in the year and will cover the same twelve month reporting period.

CRE's Safe Communities Initiative

A leaflet is now available from the Commission for Racial Equality describing its Safe Communities Initiative launched last year. The text of the leaflet can be found on the CRE's website at www.cre.gov.uk.

The aim of the initiative is to provide information and advice on promoting good community relations and to help prevent and resolve disputes or tensions as early as possible. It will draw on successful work that is being done in this field; identify the most effective community relations projects and promote their approaches as widely as possible; and serve as a source of expertise and knowledge for all communities and for local and national organisations working for them. One of the CRE's aims in setting up the initiative is to encourage people to acknowledge, discuss and appreciate their differences and to prevent relations between communities and individuals being harmed by ignorance, prejudice or fear. Further information is available from Dal Babu at the CRE on 020 7939 0115.

CRE Appointments

At the end of January the Commission for Racial Equality appointed Mohammed Aziz, of the Muslim community, and Julia Chain, of the Jewish community, as part time Commissioners.

The CRE have also just announced the appointment of their first Senior Policy Officer for Religion and Belief, Priya Lukka, who will be familiar to many in the inter faith world for her previous work on faith and volunteering.

New measures to prevent workplace discrimination

As foreshadowed in earlier issues of *Inter Faith Update*, new legislation to prevent discrimination in the workplace on grounds of sexual orientation or of religion or belief have come into force. The Sexual Orientation regulations came into force in Great Britain on 1 December and the Religion or Belief regulations on 2 December. They apply to all employers and businesses whatever their size and whether in the public or private sector. The regulations cover recruitment, terms and conditions, pay, promotion, transfers and dismissals and apply across Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales). Legislation outlawing discrimination on grounds of religion has been in existence in Northern Ireland for some years.

The Regulations implement the relevant strands of the European Employment Directive adopted in late 2000 outlawing discrimination on grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief, disability and age in employment and vocational training. Amendments to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 implementing the Directive are due to come into force in October 2004 and new legislation outlawing discrimination on age grounds by the end of 2006.

Jacqui Smith, Deputy Minister for Women and Equality said: "We have long had laws to prevent discrimination in the workplace against women and on grounds of race – these new measures bring about much wider equality. For the very first time we are making discrimination unlawful on grounds of sexual orientation and religion or belief, in workplaces in England, Scotland and Wales. Unfair discrimination in employment must not be tolerated. People should not be denied jobs, suffer victimisation or harassment, because of prejudice."

Planning for new Commission for Equality and Human Rights

A “task force” was established in December to advise the Government on the creation of the proposed new Commission for Equality and Human Rights. Chaired by Jacqui Smith, Deputy Minister for Women and Equality, it will help draw up detailed proposals for inclusion in the consultative White Paper which the Government plans to publish in April.

Three members (sharing two seats) have a particular interest in faith community concerns. They are Mohammed Aziz, of the British Muslim Research Centre; Rev John Kennedy, Co-ordinating Secretary for Church and Society at Churches Together in Britain and Ireland; and Brian Pearce, Director of the Inter Faith Network. The Executive Director of the British Humanist Association, Hanne Stinson, is also a member of the “task force.” A full list of its members can be found at www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk.

Papers circulated to the members of the Task Force for discussion are available in advance of its meetings and notes of its meetings and other material flowing from them are also available on the same website. It is therefore possible for a much wider range of organisations and individuals to keep in touch with the proceedings of the “task force” and, if they so wish, to contact its members about its work or to approach the Department for Trade and Industry direct.

Select Committee on Religious Offences in England and Wales

As reported in Issue 22 of *Inter Faith Update*, the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Religious Offences in England and Wales was published in June last year. It contained a detailed analysis of the current law relating to religious offences. It

examined the case for introducing a new offence of incitement to religious hatred; reviewed old common law offences, including blasphemy, and various statutory provisions, including the Ecclesiastical Courts Jurisdiction Act of 1860 and considered whether there is a case for repealing these, leaving them unchanged or modernising them.

In December the Home Office gave their response to the Select Committee’s report. This confirms that the Government remains sympathetic to the idea of legislating to create a new offence of incitement to religious hatred, as it tried to do in the context of the Anti-Terrorism Bill in the autumn of 2001 (from which it was dropped following opposition in the House of Lords). It says that it has no immediate plans to reintroduce the proposal but will consider doing so if an opportunity arises for doing so. Meanwhile, it will listen carefully to any further debates on this subject.

On the blasphemy law the Government’s position is that it wants to listen to the arguments (on what the Select Committee’s report shows is a rather difficult and contested issue). The Home Secretary has made it clear that he personally does not favour the extension of the law on blasphemy to other faiths and is attracted by the idea of repealing it but sees a need for a full debate to inform the way forward. The Select Committee says in its report that it is doubtful whether a prosecution brought under the present blasphemy law would now be successful, because there could be an objection to this on human rights grounds, on the basis that the blasphemy law is a discriminatory piece of legislation since it only protects the beliefs of the Church of England (and those of other Churches and other faiths only insofar as these overlap with them). Therefore, the existing law may be symbolic rather than having any practical force. Even so, some attach importance to this.

The Government endorses the report’s view that “those of religious faith deserve the best protection the law will allow, including protection for their places and rites of religious observance” but comments that it is unclear whether the Ecclesiastical Courts Jurisdiction Act in practice addresses conduct not covered by other criminal offences. It says that if the

opportunity arises for reform of the law in the areas covered by the report it will look carefully at the case for retaining or updating the Act. The full text of the Home Office's response can be found at www.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm60/6091/6091.pdf.

The Select Committee's report and the Government's response to it were discussed at the meeting of the Network's Faith Communities Consultative Forum on 1 December (see page 2) and subsequently at a further ad hoc meeting on 4 February arranged by the Network to enable representatives of faith community organisations to discuss further their position on the issues covered in the report. These meetings showed considerable support for early legislation on incitement to religious hatred, although views on the blasphemy law were more varied.

A debate in the House of Lords on the Select Committee's report and the Government's response to it is awaited.

Commission on Urban Life and Faith

The Church of England has set up a Commission on Urban Life and Faith, to look into the state of urban life in England and to see what progress Church and state are making in improving life in the cities; to mark the changes made by de-industrialisation, population movement and globalisation; to reflect on the challenge God is making to the Church and the nation; and to offer a new vision of the Church in the city. The Commission will also be seeking to "demonstrate the effectiveness of the Churches' and other faiths' work in deeply disadvantaged areas.". The Commission is chaired by Baroness Rev Kathleen Richardson, of the Methodist Church and Moderator of the Churches' Commission for Inter Faith Relations. It includes representatives of other Christian denominations and also has a Muslim member. The appointment of a Jewish member is awaited. Further information is available by sending an email to: culs@c-of-e.org.uk

National Non-Statutory Framework for RE

As reported in Issue 23 of *Inter Faith Update*, Charles Clarke, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, has asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to develop a national non-statutory framework for Religious Education in England. A Steering Group and a Writing Group for this exercise have been established and it is anticipated that a consultative draft of the framework document will be published this spring.

Organ donation and religious perspectives

UK Transplant, an agency of the NHS, has recently published a new leaflet, *Organ Donation and Religious Perspectives*, which offers a brief guide to religious viewpoints regarding organ donation in Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. The leaflet is being distributed through transplant co-ordinators in hospitals around the country and is also available by contacting orders@uktransplant.nhs.uk. Further information is available at the web site: www.uktransplant.org.uk.

The Three Faiths Forum Medical Group met on 12 February to hear and discuss a talk on organ transplantation from Dr David Jones, Senior Lecturer in Bioethics, School of Theology, Philosophy and History, St Mary's College. Further information from The Three Faiths Forum: www.threefaithsforum.org.uk.

Faiths take part in "Big Conversation"

Over 120 representatives from different faith groups took part in an event in Westminster as part of the Labour Party's "Big Conversation" on 5 February. The event was hosted by Health

Secretary, Dr John Reid MP. Discussion focused on how best the Government can work with faith communities to develop policy and build cohesive communities.

Lambeth Palace hosts publication launch

A reception was held by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, at Lambeth Palace on 4 February. This was linked to the publication of *Scriptures in Dialogue* which is the record of three days of dialogue between 25 leading Christian and Muslim scholars which took place at the invitation of the Archbishop in Qatar in April 2003. The book is edited by Rev Canon Dr Michael Ipgrave and includes the text of a major lecture on inter faith relations given by the Archbishop at the University of Birmingham shortly after the Qatar event. Priced £12.95, the report is produced by Church House Publishing. For further information, email publishing@c-of-e.org.

First Scottish Inter Faith Youth Conference

The first Scottish Inter Faith Youth Conference was held at St. Mungo's Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow on 4 December. The conference had been planned by a steering group of young people from diverse faith communities and the Scottish Inter Faith Council. Opening the conference were the Convenor of the Scottish Inter Faith Council, Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Shereen Nanjiani TV presenter for 'Scotland Today' and Deputy Lord Provost of Glasgow, Baillie Christine Divine.

The conference offered workshops, meditation, panel presentations, exhibitions and lots of time for dialogue. The 80 or so young people who attended had a great time exploring 'How young people can contribute to Scotland's future'. The steering committee for the conference consisted of young people from the Buddhist, Baha'i, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Jain, Hindu, Sikh, Brahma Kumaris and Rastafarian faiths and the

experience of working together has helped build bonds of friendship and a commitment to future inter faith projects, demonstrating that unity in diversity is possible between religions.

St Martin-in-the-Fields inter faith reception

An inter faith reception at the House of Lords, in support of a major building project at St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, was held on 28 January. It was hosted by the Anglican Bishop of London, Richard Chartres. The church, adjacent to Trafalgar Square, is one of London's best known and has a long tradition of service to the homeless and disadvantaged. It also has a significant place in the history of inter faith relations in this country, having helped start the multi faith Commonwealth Day Observance and continues to host dialogue events. More details of the project are available at: www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org

Faiths discuss regeneration

On 26 February a conference, "Regenerating Communities Through Faith" was held in Preston. The conference was organised by the Faith Based Regeneration Network UK in conjunction with the Gujarat Hindu Society and the Preston Faith Forum. The conference's aims were to enable local faith-based organisations to network with each other and with policy-makers and to influence and shape policies for faith based regeneration. Further information is available by contacting Dr Doreen Finneron, email: fbrnuk@aol.com.

Inter faith debate on restoring faith in politics

The Christian Socialist Movement and Making Votes Count held a meeting, "Restoring Faith in Politics" at the House of Commons on 23

February. The meeting was chaired by Chris Bryant MP and speakers included Beth Breeze of the Social Market Foundation, Sher Khan from the Muslim Council of Britain, and Jonathan Gorsky of the Council of Christians and Jews. Further information from paul@christiansocialist.org.uk

Pilot Project in Leeds on Local Consultation

As part of the recently completed Home Office review of patterns of engagement between the Government and faith communities in England, a pilot project was commissioned to explore the effectiveness of various mechanisms for consulting faith communities at a local level. Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum was invited to take the lead in conducting this pilot consultation, which had as its focus the role which faith groups can play in supporting offenders on their discharge from prison and the views of faith communities on sentencing regimes. It was conducted on behalf of the Forum by a project team based in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Leeds.

The completed report of the project will shortly be available from the Faith Communities Unit in the Home Office. Copies may be ordered from: Warwick.Hawkins@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk.

Lord Mayor hosts multi-faith dinner at Mansion House

On 10 February the Lord Mayor of London, Alderman Robert Finch, hosted the bi-annual dinner for the Archbishops and Bishops of the Anglican Communion at Home and Overseas". As on previous occasions, representatives of different faith communities in the UK were also invited to attend.

International Interfaith Centre celebrates 10 years of work

The International Interfaith Centre (IIC) celebrated its 10th Anniversary on 6 December with an Interfaith Afternoon at Oxford Town Hall. The event included the launch of the IIC's Directory of Faith Communities in Oxford, an Interfaith Forum addressing local issues of mutual concern within a framework of international and national agendas, a youth interfaith photography exhibition entitled "Through Another's Eyes", as well as music from local musicians and birthday refreshments. For the full report, see www.interfaith-center.org/anniversary.htm (Oxford Projects pdf file).

Baha'i inter faith panel and reception

The Office of External Affairs of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is sponsored an inter faith panel discussion and reception, on "Reconciling to our Creator by Reconciling to our Neighbour". It was held at the time of the visit of Shayk Ali N'Daw of the International Sufi School. The panel included representatives of the Baha'i faith, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The event took place at the National Baha'i Centre in London.

WCRP discuss "Cultures for Peace"

The UK chapter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace held a meeting on "Cultures for Peace" at the London Inter Faith Centre on 12 November. This followed an earlier meeting on the same theme last March. The aim of both meetings was to explore what different religions have to say about peace and how this can be applied to the contemporary situation.

Honours and awards

On 13 October the French Ambassador, on behalf of the President of France, presented Sir Sigmund Sternberg with the Order of the Officier de la Legion d'Honneur. The award was in honour of Sir Sigmund's achievements within the British Jewish community and his inter faith work.

Canon Andrew White has received the annual Sternberg Interfaith Award for his work as the Co-Director of the International Centre of Reconciliation at Coventry Cathedral. The award was presented by Foreign Office Minister of State, Baroness Symons, on 9 November at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

In the New Year's Honours list Sidney Shipton of the Three Faiths Forum received an OBE for services to the Jewish community and inter faith relations; and Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain received an MBE for services to community relations in Maidenhead.

Dr Indarjit Singh received a second honorary doctorate in February when Leicester University conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws.

REGIONAL UPDATE

East of England Faiths Council launched

The East of England Faiths Council (EEFC) was launched at an event at Peterborough Town Hall on 4 December. Guests were welcomed by Gillian Beasley, Chief Executive of Peterborough City Council, who hosted the event. Zia-ul Hussain, a Co-Chair of EEFC and Chair of Peterborough Inter Faith Council then explained how the Council emerged from the East of England Faiths Leadership Conference, before introducing John Battle MP who gave the keynote speech. The EEFC has been set up to raise awareness of faith communities and to build good relations between the faiths of the Region. It relates to the East of England Development Agency and has a "seat" on the Regional Assembly.

The EEFC also launched a regional faiths calendar listing religious festivals of different faiths for the year 2004. This is currently available at the web site: www.eefaithscouncil.org.uk and will soon be made available in a printed form.

Birmingham

On 26 February Birmingham City Council held a Faith Round Table Discussion, "Working Together to Address Issue of Faith and Religion in Building Cohesive Communities in Birmingham". The event was chaired by Wendy Momen of the Baha'i community. Harriet Crabtree, Deputy Director of the Inter Faith Network, gave a presentation on the findings of the Network's recent survey of local inter faith activity in the UK. Further information is available by contacting email: equalities@birmingham.gov.uk.

Calderdale

Calderdale Interfaith Council was officially launched on 3 December at the Town Hall Halifax. The launch was entitled "A Celebration of Faiths in Calderdale". The evening was introduced by the Mayor and guest speakers included, Anglican Bishop of Pontefract Tony Robinson; Venerable Samten Kelsang; and Maulana Chishti. Further information from sail.suleman@calderdale.gov.uk

Derby

Work has begun on the new Multi Faith Centre at the University of Derby. The planning for this project began in 1991, with advice and support from members of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh traditions. On 22 December, 14 local children from these seven faiths gathered at the site of the new Centre to help lay its foundation stone. Further information from Eileen Fry, e.fry@derby.ac.uk

Inter faith profile

Sister Margaret Shepherd nds is the Director of the Council of Christian and Jews (CCJ) and is an Executive Committee member of the Inter Faith Network.

How did you first get involved with Jewish Christian dialogue?

I belong to the Sisters of Zion, a Roman Catholic Congregation which has the specific task/charism of fostering good relations between Christians and Jews and reminding the Church of its origins and unique links with Judaism. In 1977 I had the opportunity of studying rabbinics for three years at the Leo Baeck College in London, which trains men and women for the progressive rabbinate. This, for me, was my first in-depth encounter with the Jewish community. I went on to help run the Sisters of Zion Study Centre for Christian Jewish Relations (now known as Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter) in Central London and from there joined the Council of Christians and Jews, first as Education Officer and now as Director.

How do you see CCJ's role in the wider context of multi-faith dialogue in the UK?

CCJ has now had 62 years of experience in the unique dialogue between Jews and Christians to offer as an example of "dialogue in depth" and our special gift to the wider encounter and dialogue between all faiths. Additionally, at this point in time - after 9/11 and the war in Iraq - we feel it is particularly important to extend our role in a specifically bilateral way with the Muslim community, so we are supporting and engaging in Christian - Muslim and, likewise, in Jewish - Muslim dialogues. We initiated a special CCJ working party three years ago for those of various faiths involved in inter faith work to explore the concept and value of inter faith dialogue and to support each other in this work. Members of the group have found this helpful and the group has initiated study days for others concerning these matters.

CCJ has an active young people's programme. How do you see this work developing in the future?

The CCJ young people's section, YES! runs a *Faithshare* programme on university campuses to encourage dialogue and understanding. In the future this work will need to become increasingly localised and grass-roots led, to really capture people's imaginations and encourage them to get involved. The ideal situation would be if no formal dialogue was necessary because schools and society were so good at encouraging encounter of the other and celebration of difference. In reality though I suspect that our work will be needed for many more generations to continue to push these issues and challenge prejudice, racism and anti semitism.

What are your hopes for the future for inter faith work in the UK generally?

I hope that we shall go from strength to strength, becoming ever more a source of mutual encouragement, friendship and support, as we deepen our knowledge of, respect for and trust in each other. I also hope that we can work closely together on matters which concern us all as citizens of the UK and as members of God's family.

Media and a multi faith society

A conference looking at the contribution the media can make to good community relations is being organised by the Media Trust in association with the Inter Faith Network for the UK and *respect* on 31 March in London. For further information contact Harriet Crabtree at the Network Office for details.

Horsham

A new forum has been established to enable the different faith groups in Horsham in Surrey to talk together and also to help others learn about the faiths. It has been running for about a year and will be meeting at the end of February to formalise its aims. Further information from Richard Boeke, email: r.boeke@virgin.net or Tel 01403 257801.

Leeds

Baha'i, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh leaders were invited in January to BHH Synagogue in Leeds to be present at a Shabbat service and bar-mitzvah. The invitation was extended through the Leeds Faith Community Liaison Forum which had arranged last year for representatives of the various faiths to attend the Grand Mosque during Ramadan.

Leicester

A Faiths Regeneration Network was launched in Leicester on 9 December. Nearly 70 faith representatives attended from many traditions and representatives from statutory service providers were also present. The event was chaired by the Archdeacon of Leicester, the Ven. Richard Atkinson. Further information from Riaz Ravat, Regeneration Development Officer, tel 0116 248 7424, riaz.ravat@leccofe.org

London

Moral Maze

The World Congress of Faiths London Programme held a "Moral Maze" inter faith panel discussion on the theme "Religious Prejudice: A Challenge to Interfaith Relations" on 19 February at the London Inter-Faith Centre.

South London RE discussion

An informal discussion about Religious Education policy took place at the Risaala School Tooting, London on Sunday 25 January. The event was organised by South

London Inter Faith Group. It was chaired by Brian Pearce, Director of the Inter Faith Network, and included contributions from Firdos Qazi, the school's head teacher, and Sarah Thorley, a teacher and RE adviser to Lambeth schools. A debate followed on the issues surrounding the Government's proposals for a national framework for RE and on the teaching of RE in faith schools.

Women's inter faith meeting

The Reform Synagogues Guild held an inter faith meeting called Building Bridges on 25 February at the West London Synagogue to explore how women of different faiths live in the UK today.

Barking

The East London Three Faiths Forum held a meeting at the Barking mosque with the theme "Does Christianity have a future in Britain?". Rev Robert Hampson, Barrister Abdul Rahaman Jaffrey and Rabbi David Hulbert spoke at the meeting.

Barnet

Barnet's Inter Faith Network Steering Group held its first meeting on 11 February. Further information from Chris Henshaw at chris.henshaw@barnet.gov.uk or tel 020 8359 7261.

Brent

The eighth meeting of the "Interfaith Call for World Peace" in the London Borough of Brent was held at the Sri Saddhatisa International Buddhist Centre on 28 December. The event involved Venerable Galayaye Piyaddisi, the head of SSIBC, and participants of other faiths.

Wandsworth

On 28 January the Wandsworth Faith Communities Group held an event on the theme of family life. The group was established in 2002. It is chaired by Council Leader Edward Lister and includes representatives from the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities. Further information from Amanda McDonnell, tel 020 8871 6182 amcdonnell@wandsworth.gov.uk.

On 23 February, a Wandsworth Multi-Faith Network was launched at Wandsworth Town Hall by the Community Empowerment Fund Network. 60 people attended from many faiths and a steering group was formed to take the work forward. Further information from Catriona Robertson, tel 020 8674 4610.

Westminster

Westminster Faith Exchange an initiative of Westminster City Council brought together young people from seven different faiths who developed an interfaith event called Faith Links. The performance event, featuring music, drama, video clips and readings, took place at the Salvation Army's Regent Hall on Oxford Street, London on 25 February. The event was supported by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Alma Royalton Kisch Trust.

Nottingham

Last year Nottingham Inter Faith Council received funding from the Community Learning Chest to set up an exhibition about faiths in Nottingham. It includes professionally produced panels about nine local faiths and the inter faith group itself, and there is a linked leaflet pack about the faiths. The exhibition was displayed in Nottingham Central Library for four weeks in October and November, and is now touring schools and community venues. Further information is available on the Inter Faith Council's web site: www.interfaithnottm.org.uk.

Sheffield

A tree planting took place on 30 November at Abbeyfield Park as part of National Tree Week. It was arranged by South Yorkshire Forest with help and support from Sheffield Interfaith. An inter faith service was held to dedicate the tree and there was a discussion of the significance of trees for different faiths. Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Pagan and Quaker participants were involved. Further information about the project is available from lynnrisha@fsmail.net

INTERNATIONAL UPDATE**Most Venerable Vajiragnana Celebrates 75 years**

A celebration of Network Executive Committee Member, Most Venerable Dr Vajiragnana's, 75th birthday was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 12 February. It was attended by the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka and over 1000 guests. Paul Seto of the Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK) made a presentation on inter faith activities and the many Buddhist communities in the UK.

International conference on Christian-Muslim regeneration initiatives

Faith Regen UK, in association with Philadelphia Cathedral and the Islamic Society of North America, held a conference entitled *Building Positive Inclusive Communities through Housing and Regeneration* at Philadelphia Cathedral in the USA from 17-19 February. Speakers from the UK included Stephen Timms, Minister for State at the Department of Trade and Industry, Rev Chris Beales, Director of the Employment Forum UK, and Saif Ahmed, Chief Executive of Faith Regen UK. Over a hundred delegates discussed the role faith communities can play in regeneration and social and economic development and heard accounts from a number of case studies from both the UK and USA.

Dr Michael Hooker

It is with deep regret that we record the death of Dr Michael Hooker in Brighton on 26 January.

Michael was the driving force behind the Donnington Grove Inter Faith programme for many years and more recently set up the Newton Inter Faith Group, based in Battersea, London. He will be sadly missed.

Special offer on selected Inter Faith Network Publications

Time to Talk: Faiths at the Table of Dialogue in Today's UK Report of the 2003 National Meeting, looking at the importance of dialogue between the faith communities in the UK.
ISBN 1 902906 09 8 **Special Price: £2.00**

Community Cohesion: A New Agenda for Inter Faith Relations? Report of the 2002 National Meeting, exploring the role of faith in the community cohesion agenda.
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Faith and Service to the Community 2001 National Meeting Report, looking at the role of faith in community service projects.
ISBN 1 902906 07 1. **Special Price: £2.00**

Inter Faith Issues and the RE Curriculum Report on the June 2001 seminar held in association with the National Association of SACREs. Examining issues and practicalities of introducing inter faith issues into the curriculum. Published 2001 ISBN 1 902906 06 3
Special Price £4.50

Local Inter Faith Activity in the UK: A Survey
The number of local inter faith initiatives in the UK is increasing rapidly. 43% of local inter faith bodies have come into existence since the beginning of 2000. This report details the findings of a six month survey in 2003 which mapped the changing landscape of local inter faith activity around the UK.
ISBN 1 902906 11 X. **Price £8.95**

Religions in the UK Directory 2001-2003

A comprehensive directory providing an introduction to the faith communities in the UK, complete with listings of local places of worship and faith organisations. Edited by Professor Paul Weller and published by the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby in association with the Inter Faith Network.

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DIARY DATES

Local inter faith events

Space only allows one event per organisation to be listed. For details of other events contact the relevant local groups. Local inter faith events are also listed in the One Family Newsletter available from the World Congress of Faiths, c/o London Inter Faith Centre, 125 Salisbury Road, London NW6 6RG

9 March, Bedford Council of Faiths. Inter-Faith Game Evening, playing "Diversity". 7.30 at the Quaker Meeting House, 5 Lansdowne Road, Bedford, MK40 2BY. Further information, tel 01234 307281.

9 March, Huddersfield Interfaith Council. "Inter Faith Day" at Huddersfield Town Hall. Further information from Rev Mel Garside, tel 01484 424669.

11 March, Nelson and Brierfield Building Bridges, Rabbi Reuven Silverman will be giving the second talk in a series of six meetings on "The Value of Human Life from the Point of View of Four Major World Faiths". 7pm Nelson library, Nelson. Further information from Building Bridges, tel 01282 719303.

11 March, London. The Women's Interfaith Network will be holding a meeting in central London to discuss the formation of local inter faith groups for women, and how WIN can help and facilitate such groups. For further information contact gilda.levy@wominet.co.uk or see www.wominet.co.uk

18 March, Brighton and Hove Inter Faith Contact Group. "Pardon and Peace – the Only Way", talk by the Very Revd Nicholas Frayling. 7.30 at the Chapel Royal, North Street, Brighton. Further information from tel: 01273 722438.

18 March and 25 March, Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association. "Sikhism: Past, Present and Future". Talk by Balwant Singh Saggu of Glasgow's Sikh community. 7-9 pm at St George's West Church, 58 Shandwick Place. Further Information from tel: 0131 667 4360.

25 March, Manor Park, London. East London Three Faiths Forum discussion, "Is the West Right to Fear Islam?" at the Froud Centre Romford Road, E12. Further information from tel: 020 7485 2538

26 March Dundee Inter Faith Group. First of a series of three meetings on the theme of Faith and Family. Further information tel: 01382 667119.

27 March, Horsham Inter Faith Group. "Baha'i Faith and Emerging World Civilisation", talk by Dr Farhang Tahzib, Director of Public Health in the NHS. Further information from Richard Boeke email: r.boeke@virgin.net or tel 01403 257801

30 March, Merseyside Council of Faiths. "Prayer in the Hindu Tradition", a talk by Dr Ajit Kumar. 7.45, Hindu Centre and Temple, Edge Lane, Liverpool. Further information tel: 0151 733 1541.

23 April, Cardiff Interfaith Association. Visit to the new Cyncoed Synagogue. Further information from Alan Schwartz, tel 029 2075 0990.

27 April, Bristol, "An Understanding of Jihad", talk by Qari Abdulmajeed, Director of the Islamic Information Centre. 7.15 at the Unitarian Bristol Meeting, Surrey Lodge, Brunswick Square, Bristol 1. Further information, tel 0117 9020037 or 01454 313042.

27 April, Hampstead Interfaith Group, "The Sikh Way of Life", Dr Indarjit Singh. 8pm, 63b Belsize Park Gardens, London NW3. Further information from Eva Tucker at this address.

4 May, Brent Inter Faith, "Music from the Faiths", an evening of music from many of the world religious traditions. 7.30 at the London Inter Faith Centre, 125 Salisbury Road, London NW6 6RG. Further information, tel 020 7604 3053.

8 May, Bristol Inter Faith Group and Bath Inter Faith Group, day event hosted by the Ammerdown Centre, Radstock, Somerset, "Ways to Peace through Dialogue". Further information from: Shelagh James, 01225 422252.

16 May Edinburgh. Local Inter Faith Groups Annual Networking Conference for Scotland at the Edinburgh Synagogue. Further information from the Scottish Inter Faith Council on tel: 0141 429 4012

28 May, Cambridge Inter Faith Group, "The Root of All Evil: how money is regarded in all our faiths". An open discussion. 7.45 for 8 pm, Unitarian Hall, Victoria. Further information from Ralph Nimmann Tel: 01223 510442.

30 May, Altrincham Interfaith Group. Interfaith picnic at a local park. Venue tbc. Further information from Alf Keeling, tel 0161 912 5230 alf@akeeling.freeseve.co.uk.

5 June, Westminster Interfaith annual multi faith pilgrimage. This year the pilgrimage will be in the North East London area and will be led by Sister Elizabeth. Further information from Alfred Agius, Aagius@aol.com or tel 020 7361 4740.

11 June, Bradford. 11th Annual Bradford Concord Interfaith Society Multi Faith Walk for Friendship. Further information, tel 01274 731674.

Diary dates: Courses, exhibitions, conferences and seminars

27 February- 7 March, Edinburgh 1st Annual Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace. Featuring on 4 March a Conference on Middle Eastern Spirituality, 9.30 to 5.30, Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace. Conference registration fee £20 (£10 concessions). Further information from Neill Walker, jnwalk1300@hotmail.com or tel 0131 3314469.

10 March, London. "Challenging Islamophobia". One day conference at the Brady Centre, 192-196 Hanbury Street, London E1 5HU. Further information, tel 020 7247 1414.

22 March, London. Council of Christians and Jews. The Passion of Christ. Study and discussion day on issues raised by the Mel Gibson film. 10.15-3.30 Camelford House, 89 Albert Embankment, London SW1. £10 for CCJ members and £15 for non members. Advance reservation required. Further information, tel 010 7820 0090 or email cjrelations@ccj.org.uk

23-25 March, Oxford. World Congress of Faiths, Pre-Parliament event for people planning on attending the Parliament of World Religions in Barcelona. Being held at the Global Retreat Centre, Nuneham Courtney. Cost £50, room and board. Further information from Richard Boeke email: r.boeke@virgin.net or tel 01403 257801

25 March, London. Faith Based Regeneration Network. National conference "Tools for Regeneration". For regeneration practitioners of the different faiths to come together and learn from each other's experiences. 10.30 to 3.15 at the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre, 244 Acklam Road, London W10. Cost £150 for statutory and national voluntary organisations and £50 for all others. Further information from Dr Doreen Finneron at fbrnuk@aol.com or tel 020 88947 6160.

4 April, London. Zoroastrian Education Day. Park Crescent Conference Centre, Gulbenkian Room, International Students House, 229 Great Portland Street, London W1. Further information from Burjor Avari, tel 0161 445 7554 or Farrokh Vajifdar, tel 020 8878 4810.

25 April, London. James Allison, Catholic theologian, will be giving the fourth talk in a series of six meetings on "Exploring Spirituality". Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter, 34 Chepstow Villas, London W11 2QZ. Further information, tel 020 7727 3597 or 020 7313 8286.

3-9 May, Amerdown, Bath Art and Spirituality Network. "Exploring creation" – experiencing creation and contemplating the creator at the Amerdown Retreat Centre near Bath. Cost £370 including accommodation, food and art materials. Further information from Adam Boulter, adam.boulter@virgin.net tel 07957 286360

5 May London. World Congress of Faiths. Annual Sir Francis Younghusband lecture, "From the Holy Mountain" and illustrated talk by William Dalrymple to be held at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, 28 St John's Wood Road, London NW8, 7pm. Cost £5.00. Preceded by the World Congress of Faiths AGM Further information from Richard Boeke email: r.boeke@virgin.net or tel 01403 257801

15 May, London. "How Dangerous are the New Religions?". Day seminar to be held by INFORM at the London School of Economics. £35 (£30 if advance booked). Further information from inform@lse.ac.uk tel 020 7955 7654

Inter Faith Update is the newsletter of the Inter Faith Network for the UK. It keeps a wide range of organisations and individuals interested in developing good inter faith relations in the UK in touch with UK events and projects with a significant inter faith component.

Please send any items and diary dates for consideration for inclusion in the next issue **by 28 May** to:

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