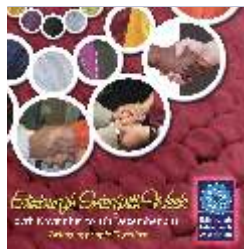


Interfaith Matters

November 2011 Issue 9

COMMUNITY NEWS AND FEATURES FOR EVERYONE

www.eifa.org.uk



Inter Faith Week 2011

Something for everyone



Teams Wanted!

World Faiths 'Big Quiz Night'
at the Mosque Kitchen .. page3



9/11 WALK FOR PEACE

As many as 200 people participated in the Leith to the West End 9/11 anniversary peace walk

As reflector vests were passed out to volunteer stewards, and multifaith prayer booklets distributed, the introductions and conversations began among those gathering.

10 years after the terrorist attacks at the World Trade Centre in New York, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Baha'is', Hindus, Sikhs, Pagans, Buddhists, Unitarians and Brahma Kumaris gathered outside the Hindu Mandir in Leith.

They gathered in remembrance of those who perished and suffered because of the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks and they

gathered with hope for a peaceful future.

The Hindu Mandir served as the starting point of the '9/11 Walk for Peace', Scotland's participation in the international '9/11 Walks' initiative.

After a warm welcome, the group was informed that each stop along the walk would include a welcome, the gift of a Peace Candle from the host faith communities.

A growing crowd, including Cardinal Keith O'Brien, Church of Scotland and Episcopal Church representatives, Rabbi David Rose, Naren Sood, Imam

Mohammad Sajjad, Wege Singh, Ruhy Parris and Ani Rinchen Khandro made its way to the Annandale St Mosque where all could enjoy the colourful new mural by Muhammad Ali.

The conversations continued as the group approached the Baha'i Centre on Albany Street and then continued on to St Mary's Metropolitan Cathedral where the full crowd of around 200 gathered on the steps of the Cathedral for a group photo.

Trying to keep ahead of the dark rain clouds, the walkers hurried their pace to St John's Scottish Episcopal Church at

the West End. Hoods and umbrellas went up as the group listened to the welcoming words of the Episcopal Primus of Scotland. All were welcomed into St. John's Church Hall to continue conversations and reflections over homemade refreshments.

Along with the Edinburgh Inter Faith Association and the hosting faith communities, event partners included: ACTS (Action of Churches Together in Scotland), Church of Scotland, Edinburgh Churches Together, SIFC (Scottish Inter Faith Council), and The Alwaleed Centre.

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Interfaith Matters

Issue 9

At grassroots, city level and wider within the Lothians there has been a tremendous growth in inter-faith encounter and engagement in the past 5-10 years. This new community newspaper is part of this growth.

For this newspaper to be truly a community project we invite volunteers from our richly diverse and experienced community to come forward to take a leading role in the development and growth of not only the newspaper but inter-faith community action. Get involved!

Articles in this edition have been written by people from a number of faith communities. We want more contributions and more people directly involved so act now!

Victor Spence
Editor

Publisher:

Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association
St John's Church
Princes Street
Edinburgh
EH2 4BJ
Scotland

t 0131 228 8146
e editor@efa.org.uk
w www.efa.org.uk

Production:

Editor: Victor Spence
Production: Victor Spence
Assistant Editor: Julia Cato
Consultant: Ken Kerr

Reporters & Contributors:

Saher Ali
Julia Cato
Prof Hugh Goddard
Helena Hardman-Moore
Ani Rinchen Khandro
Vicky MacDonald
Katherine Newbigging
Donald Reid
Sohalb Saeed
Victor Spence
Iain Stewart
and pupils from St George's School for Girls



Continued from front page



Prayers of Peace at Hindu Mandir just before the walk begins



Photo opportunity at Annandale St Mosque peace mural



At the halfway mark of the 9/11 Walk for Peace outside St Mary's RC Cathedral

Bishop retires to his great passions



Bishop Brian Smith, the 25th Bishop of Edinburgh, retired August 2011. He was installed in the Diocese on 23 June 2001. Born and raised in Edinburgh, he attended school and university in the city before moving on to study theology in Cambridge, focusing on philosophy of religion.

In 1972, he was ordained deacon in the Diocese of Oxford. Currently, he is a Trustee of Scotland's Churches Scheme, a Trustee of Waverley Care, and a member of the UNESCO (Scotland) Committee.

Although retired, Rt. Bishop Brian Smith will remain active doing work he is passionate about.

The Executive Committee of the Edinburgh Inter Faith Association hopes to attract more of Brian's excellent contributions in future events. We wish him well and take this opportunity to thank him for his significant support of the inter faith movement here in Edinburgh.



Capital's faith leaders to meet

The Conference of Edinburgh's Religious Leaders will convene during this year's inter faith week at the City Chambers.

Over 30 faith tradition delegates will attend and this meeting is considered to be the most religiously diverse meeting in Scotland.

Questions on the cosmos, euthanasia and God... easy on a Wednesday morning!



A multi faith question time panel at St George's school for girls

The faith panel, including a Tibetan Buddhist nun, a Muslim Imam, a Minister of the United Reform Church, a Sikh, and a Baha'i, was an informative discussion on the varied faiths and cultures found in our own community.

The debates involved topics such as how far faith defines a person, the balance between science and faith and even the delicate subject of euthanasia. Despite the extensive mixture of religions, and their individual beliefs, there were many similarities in the representatives' responses.

While the Sikh community believe that their physical appearance and symbolic objects define their identity, the Buddhist

preferred not to be defined by how she was dressed.

Most of the representatives believed that a fine balance should be kept when discussing science and religion: it seemed each representative was willing to accept scientific advancements in modern society while keeping their personal morals at the forefront. The Baha'i woman, in her occupation as a doctor, proves that science and religion can complement each other.

The faith panel enabled us to appreciate diversity. And although we may have different views on certain subjects, our beliefs should bring us together rather than set us apart.

By students at St George's School for Girls



Inter Faith Week has something for all

The Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association celebrates Inter-Faith Week this November with a special programme to mark its fifth year.

EIFA started marking the occasion in 2006 with a series of events aimed to build and deepen understanding and respect between people of all faiths and beliefs.

This year, Inter-Faith Week runs from the 27th November to 4th December and the 2011 programme is set to be as diverse as ever, with contributions from local Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Pagans, Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, Unitarians and Brahma Kumaris.

However, the programme is the most ambitious yet with highlights including *Three Faiths, Three Friends*, where the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Imam of Annandale Mosque and the Rabbi of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation visit each other's places of faith, and the *Conference of Religious Leaders* which is the most religiously diverse meeting in Scotland.

There are also some of the usual favourites

including *Meet Your Neighbours*, an opportunity to visit the Hindu temple, Sikh Gurdwara, Gypsy/ Traveller Church and other places of faith as well as the *Community Meal* where on this occasion the £6.20 ticket price will not only feed you but also a child in Malawi for a whole year through the extraordinary work of Scottish charity, Mary's Meals.



World faiths 'Big Quiz Night' is also our big curry night at the Mosque Kitchen

Victor Spence, EIFA General Secretary said: 'Inter-Faith dialogue, understanding and co-operation has never been as necessary as it is now. People of diverse religions

and other beliefs have the opportunity in Inter Faith Week to get to know each other better. Such engagement will inevitably lead to better relations in our immediate local community as well as across the city at large. There are a range of talks, discussions, films, 'open door' events as well as the world faiths 'big quiz' to educate and engage people.

Edinburgh is a richly diverse city religiously and few people might appreciate that there are not only numerous Christian denominations here but there are also Muslims in diversity, two Jewish traditions, Baha'is, at least eight Buddhist traditions, Hindus, Sikhs, Unitarians, Pagans, Brahma Kumaris, Quakers and others across the city.

If you ever wanted to know what goes on in a Mosque or why a Sikh wears a Turban and doesn't cut his hair or what a Buddhist believes this is the week to find out.'

Other highlights include a talk on the 'Spiritual in Architecture', a nativity play in Festival Square and a conversation event at the National Library between Bishop Brian Smith and hairdresser Charlie Miller. There are also film screenings at the Filmhouse cinema featuring 'Little Town of Bethlehem' and 'Into Great Silence'. Both films will be followed by Q&A with local faith representatives.

To finish off the programme, a regular and light-hearted event, the *Big Multi Faith Quiz Night*, will be held on Sunday 4th December at 6.30pm where a very diverse group of people form teams and are tested on their knowledge of the world's religious traditions. For the event and not to be missed the Mosque Kitchen will be serving up a delicious curry.

The full Inter Faith Week programme can be downloaded at our website www.eifa.org.uk



New service for young Black and Minority Ethnic people with disability support needs

Leaving school or college, and the children's services provided by social work is one such transition time. This is a difficult time for children with support needs, but particularly for those from a black and ethnic minority background.

BME communities can face additional barriers to support; as they may not have enough information about what is available, or have concerns about the cultural sensitivity of services. Also individuals and their families can face stigma from within their community because of a lack of understanding of what learning disability is and what causes it, all of which can make them vulnerable to social exclusion.

Asma Haq, who is a carer talks about her concerns: 'It is very difficult, when they (her sons) leave school to know what choices are available...it will be a difficult time'.

We can help young people at this time to think about their future, and help them to access services and support that can help them to achieve their goals. We will also run groups so that young adults can meet with their peers to form

supportive relationships and build their confidence. Young people will be in control of these groups, with as much or as little support as they need. Our service will be centred around the wishes and needs of the young person, and can work with them one to one, with their family and with other young people.

We can help with: Providing benefits advice, housing needs, accessing college courses, getting jobs and voluntary work, meeting new people. If you would like any further information, please contact our BEMAS Transitions Advisors on:

Tel: 0131 475 2315 or email infoandadvice@actiongroup.org.uk www.actiongroup.org.uk



For children and adults with support needs and learning disabilities and their carers



EIFA reps visit Auschwitz

At the invitation of the Holocaust Education Trust Victor Spence of EIFA and Wege Singh of the Sikh Gurdwara recently traveled with over 250 high school pupils and teachers from across Scotland to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi death camp in Poland.

Victor Spence said: 'you simply can't understand the holocaust until you visit a place like this. Processing my own experience has taken me sometime.'



Rest in peace Haji Maqbool

Mr Ahmad Maqbool Haji, the founder of the Mosque Kitchen has very recently passed away. We send condolences to his family after the sudden loss.

A trust in his name supported flood victims in Pakistan with a hospital, a mobile dispensary, food stoves, beds and duvets. The trust very recently carpeted the Freetown Sierra Leone prison mosque after a plea from Methodist Minister Peter Clark who is currently based in Freetown.

Haji Maqbool was a generous and funny man who will be sadly missed by many.

Imam Feisal

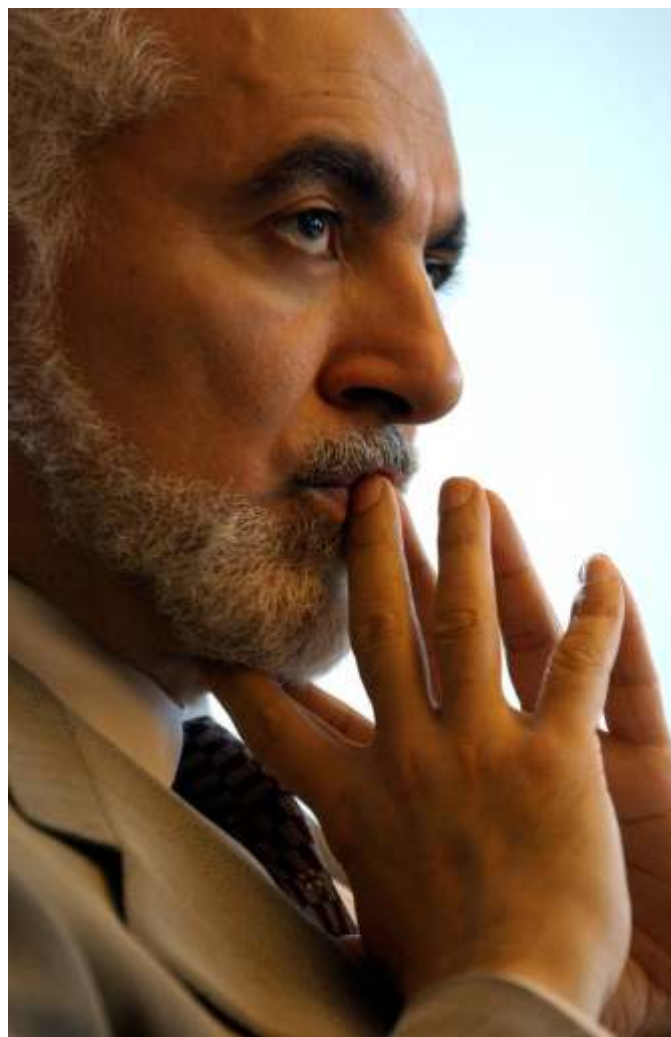
in the spotlight ...

Imam Feisal has made national and international headlines for his efforts to bridge the Muslim-West divide. Imam Feisal is the founder of the Cordoba Initiative, a multinational multifaith organization dedicated to improving understanding and building trust among people of all cultures and faith traditions.

The Cordoba Initiative also works with state and nonstate actors to improve Muslim-West relations. Under Imam Feisal's leadership, the Cordoba Initiative's programs craft strategic avenues for approaching divisive Muslim-West tensions. The programs include the Muslim Leaders of Tomorrow (MLT), which cultivates the next generation of Muslim leaders from all over the world, and the Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE), which empowers Muslim women globally.

In 1997, he founded the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA) the first Muslim organization committed to building bridges between Muslims and the American public by elevating the discourse on Islam through educational outreach, interfaith collaboration, culture and arts.

Imam Feisal was listed as one of the Top 100 Global Thinkers of 2010 by the Foreign Policy magazine, and most recently in April 2011, Time Magazine named him among the 100 most influential people of the world. He has appeared regularly at the Council on Foreign Relations, in national and international media such as CNN and BBC, and has been widely quoted in The New York Times, Huffington Post and the Jerusalem Post.



Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf receives inaugural Edinburgh Peace Award

By Prof Hugh Goddard

ON PRESENTATION OF THE INAUGURAL EDINBURGH PEACE AWARD TO IMAM FEISAL ABDUL RAUF

The month of August is a good time to be in Edinburgh for two particular reasons. First, it is an opportunity to see in the flesh people who are well-known in other contexts. Secondly, it is an opportunity to think on interesting and significant themes, including, in 2011, the tenth anniversary of the events of 11th September 2001 in New York and Washington DC. The Festival of Spirituality and Peace arranged an event on 27 August which combined both of these themes, a conversation with Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf on 'The Day that Changed the World'.

This event offered an opportunity to see and hear

someone who is well-known because of the reporting in the media of certain events which took place in the United States a year or so ago, when Pastor Terry Jones threatened to burn a copy of the Qur'an in public as part of an attempt to obstruct the construction of an Islamic Cultural Center in Lower Manhattan; and to reflect on the significant and interesting theme of the events of 9/11. The Alwaleed Centre in the University of Edinburgh is very pleased to have been able to support this event.

Those of us who have had the opportunity to hear Imam Feisal have heard some very inspiring words. Three words in particular stand out, all, as it happens, beginning with 'H'. In the context of a discussion about the nature of religion, there was a focus on 'Humanity'. On a BBC radio programme,

he expressed the vital necessity of 'Healing'; and then in the context of the FoSP Closing and Peace Award ceremony, we heard about 'Hope'.

These themes together make a very important point: some Muslims are motivated by visceral hatred of the West, portray Christianity as a polytheistic aberration, and would not be seen dead in a Christian church. Others, by contrast, are US citizens, stress the common ground between Christians and Muslims, and Jews, in the spirit of medieval Cordoba, and are quite prepared to preach in a Christian church in the context of a Eucharistic service.

All of this shows clearly that Muslims are a debating community, just like Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and others. It has been excellent to welcome Imam Feisal and Daisy Khan to Scotland, to Edinburgh, and to the Festival of Spirituality and Peace in particular. Those of us who were at St John's during the Sunday service on 28 August heard the Collect, the Special Prayer in the Anglican/Episcopalian calendar for this Sunday, which included the words 'Increase in us true religion'. True religion, whatever community label it bears, is surely a religion of peace, and as Imam Feisal has expounded it. Islam is a religion of peace, so the Peace Award is richly deserved, and may God bless all the work of Imam Feisal and of Daisy Khan for peace.

Professor Hugh Goddard is the Director of the HRH Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World, University of Edinburgh



Imam Feisal receiving the award and a City of Edinburgh Tartan scarf from George Grubb The Lord Provost



Photo: Japanese Tea Ceremony

East meets West in the heart of the Festival

This year's festival flew by in a blur of colour, discussion and laughter. With nearly 300 events taking place in three weeks across Scotland there were no shortages of highlights to choose from.

As always a range of challenging issues were broached during the conversation events. We were delighted to welcome Bishop Christopher Senyonjo from Uganda who spoke compellingly about the persecution of the homosexual community in his country. It was also a huge privilege to hear Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf discuss religious pluralism and Muslims in the United States post 9/11. With a touchingly personal account of his faith and vision of hope for the

future it was a truly inspirational conversation.

There was a flurry of cultural exchange taking place in the performances this year. Building on the success of past years, the Japanese Tea Ceremony hosted by the radiant Mio Shapely attracted record numbers. It was wonderful to experience the gracefulness of the ceremony in the beautiful surroundings of St John's Church. The audience watched with bated breath as the simple task of making tea was



transformed into a revered act of respect and friendship.

A new addition to the Festival was an array of workshops from Punjabi style cooking in Leith to tai chi in a church hall. People were rolling on the floor in stitches during Laughter Yoga. Uniting all ages, this hilarious event was not only good for the soul but also for the body. Fire walking in the Salisbury Centre turned out to be an exhilarating experience enjoyed by all. During these workshops people not only learned new skills but hopefully made new friends.

None of these amazing events would have been possible without our dedicated volunteers and staff. A team of nearly fifty

people from all around the world helped to make this Festival one of the most successful. Many of the volunteers came as part of the International Voluntary Service and stayed with local families. There was a huge sense of community and for three weeks a home was made in St John's for everyone involved.

With all the excitement of the festival now fading into the distance, the only thing that remains is to look to the future taking the knowledge, skills and friendships from this year and aim to turn our faith and hope into REALITY.

Katherine Newbigging
Festival Co-ordinator



Photo: Some of the FoSP international volunteer group



Remembrance

Remembrance Sunday is one of the major moments in the church year when we stop to reflect on the terrible loss of life in war or in other terrible conflicts which have happened in living memory.

But not just in church. At school in the 1960s and 1970s I remember being deeply moved by poems from First World War poets like Wilfred Owen, such as 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' and, especially, 'Strange Meeting'. Each year, on 11 November, we'd line up in the playground to observe two minutes silence at 11am remembering the signing of the Armistice which ended the First World War at that moment in 1918. After some time when that practice had fallen into abeyance it has resumed in recent years, I am glad to say.

I am aware that some find the way Remembrance is sometimes marked very difficult - for example when it involves the use of national flags or national anthems, military style marching or the parading of medals. Many such people either eschew remembrance ceremonies altogether or seek to observe it in an alternative way such as by the wearing of white poppies instead of red poppies - as a statement of the heartfelt desire for peace.

My own feeling is that there ought to be

some remembrance of the horrors endured by those - just like ourselves - swept up in the tides of war. Personally, I prefer it when that act of remembrance is conducted in a spirit of repentance and embraces all who died. I feel we ought to be deeply appreciative of and constantly thankful for those whose sacrifice has made possible the freedom we enjoy. I hope that the result of our remembrance is to strengthen our resolve to prevent such things happening again. And I am thankful that, in my lifetime, my generation has been spared the call to arms. It does not prevent me feeling empathy and sorrow for those in past generations who have not been so lucky. Remembrance jolts my imagination and forces to me face those unpleasant prospects: what ordinary people went through! And how we must therefore bend every effort to avoid the resort to war.

Avoid the resort to war... I'm troubled that this is not what we do. I am troubled that in the 304 years since its formation, there has only been ONE year when the British Army has not been engaged in military action somewhere in the world. I accept that sometimes it has been necessary - and most would cite the Second World War as such - but has war always been the last resort? NO.

It sometimes feels

that we're left only with silence and prayer. But we can offer more than silence and prayer. We can have active hope. In his visit to Edinburgh in 2005, the Dalai Lama responded to a questioner's pessimism about humanity's propensity to war by pointing out the progress in the last century - from the First World War where young men were volunteering in droves to fight the enemy to the recent decade where people demonstrated in their millions against war.

And at Christmas 2014 we will have an opportunity to remember a truly extraordinary phenomenon: the 'Christmas Truce' on Christmas Day 1914 when British and German soldiers refused to fight, emerging from their trenches to meet in the barren no man's land between them, making it a place of peace - meeting one another as human beings not as enemies.

If the spirit of that day can infuse our attitudes, then we can have peace.

Rev Donald Reid

Your Views

Donald Reid's article has opened up an opportunity for response, discussion, debate, comment and letters. Please forward your thoughts, letters or articles to us by email at editor@eifa.org.uk

New women's book group welcomes more

A new book group for women to read books with depth, and a spiritual direction has been formed and welcomes new participants.

Organiser Wendy Jones said: 'We are a small group of multifaith women who love to read good books, books with a spiritual dimension or leaning. We would love more women to join us from all faiths and

beliefs who also love to read and to explore ideas.'

The group meets central in the city on the second Monday of every month between 6pm and 8pm at different venues. Its free to attend and email Wendy Jones for venue details, reading list and further information.

Email organiser at: drwendyjones@yahoo.co.uk

'Inspiring' visit for 4th year high school pupils



Thubten Samdup and Martin Aelred meet senior pupils of St Thomas of Aquins RC High School

October 2 is the 'International Day of Non-Violence. To celebrate, the Fourth Year pupils were very lucky to receive a visit from His Holiness the Dalai Lama's representative, Thubten Samdup, to talk to us about the Dalai Lama's message of nonviolence.

We were called down to the Assembly Hall, not knowing what to expect, but it was even more than we could have imagined. The presentation began with an introduction from Victor Spence, General Secretary of the Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association who gave us a brief history of Thubten's life.

A contemporary Scottish tenor and classical guitarist Martin Aelred sang two beautiful songs: 'Nella Fantasia' and 'Ave Maria'. Martin played these spectacularly. We were all completely enthralled.

Thubten told us that the Dalai Lama particularly

wants his message to reach children. Old politicians and leaders may listen, but will not change. Children however, have their own lives ahead of them, and the potential to make a difference. He insisted that no matter how significant you might feel or your efforts are, to the people of Tibet it could be the road to freedom. It made us think about what we could do to help, and really made us want to.

It was an inspiring event for us all and one we will not forget. We were lucky to have the privilege of meeting Thubten Samdup. Many of us are now determined to help Tibetans in any way we can. We encourage all to do the same.

By Helena Hardman-Moore
4K4
St Thomas of Aquins RC
High School

Together We Can 'STOP' Domestic Abuse

"What is faith if it is not translated into action?" asked Mahatma Gandhi. Taking such a question seriously, about 30 representatives from different faith traditions and community groups gathered in support of stopping domestic abuse in their communities. This gathering on September 29th was the first Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) Faith Communities Network, a part of the faith strand of SWA's Domestic Abuse: Together We Can Stop It campaign launched in November 2010. SWA is the lead organization in Scotland campaigning and lobbying for effective responses to and prevention of domestic abuse.

Kicking off the Faith Communities Network, the SWA team launched their new website (<http://togetherwecanstopit.org/>), highlighting the *faith communities* section. The website offers tips, downloadable resources, and advice for the prevention and tackling of domestic abuse. Faith leaders taking a stand against domestic abuse, is

key to empowering faith communities to mobilize their activism. Check out the website to see a picture of the Church of Scotland Moderator, the Right Rev David Arnott, holding one of SWA's campaign 'STOP' signs. And while you're there, take action and sign the pledge to do at least one thing to end domestic abuse.



Domestic abuse can affect survivors physically, emotionally, psychologically, financially and even spiritually. An SWA spokeswoman remarked, "Domestic abuse affects women from all communities and all walks of life. With this campaign, we are trying to provide faith communities with the tools to confidently 'STOP' domestic abuse in their own communities and to enable them to network to share good practice." The Faith Communities Network event educated those present, provided the opportunity to share resources, and inspired future action within faith communities.



Send In Your News

We would like to receive your contributions to this community newspaper. This could be an article, a letter, event listings or stories on successes and challenges of individuals, families or groups in your community. Send your news to:

editor@eifa.org.uk

FEATURED FESTIVAL *DIWALI*



as peaceful. Lakshmi represents the boundless wealth of nature, health, intelligence, friends, family, long life, fame, fortune, etc.









People will often start the new business year at Diwali, and some Hindus will say prayers to the goddess for a successful year. Knowledge is said to be the ultimate wealth, for it cannot be stolen from you. It is also the ultimate strength, for it often defeats brute force. Knowledge is the ultimate in spirituality, for it is "Janna" (knowledge) that eventually leads to Enlightenment and Moksha.

Diwali is celebrated for five continuous days and each day has its own significance based on the various myths and legends. As there are many regions in India, there are many manifestations of the Diwali. In Britain, as in India, the festival is a time for thoroughly spring-cleaning the home and for wearing new clothes and most importantly, decorating buildings with fancy lights. It is also a time for buying and exchanging gifts and festive meals.

Diwali, is most commonly referred to as the Hindu festival of lights, and is the most popular of all festivals from South Asia. However, the festival is not unique to Hinduism and is also celebrated by Jains and Sikhs. For Hindus the festival celebrates the victory of good over evil, light over darkness, and knowledge over ignorance,

although the actual legends that go with the festival vary throughout India. For many Indians the festival honours Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. The two days before Diwali are dedicated to Lakshmi, whose blessings Hindus believe are essential in making their lives prosperous, fruitful as well

RELIGIOUS CALENDAR

- 
October Wednesday 26
Diwali (Hindu and Sikh)
 Diwali, the festival of lights, is the most popular of all the festivals from South Asia. It is an occasion for celebrations by Hindus as well as Jains and Sikhs.
- 
November Tuesday 1
All Saints' Day (Christian)
 All Saints' Day (also known as All Hallows' Day or Halloween) is when Anglicans and Roman Catholics honour all saints, known and unknown, of the Christian church. Orthodox churches celebrate it on the first Sunday after Pentecost.
- 
November Sunday 6
Eid-UI-Adha (Muslim)
 Festival of Sacrifice marking the day after Arafat. The Day of Arafat is the most important day in the Hajj ritual. This is a four day holiday
- 
November Saturday 12
Birth of Baha'u'llah (Bahai)
 Celebrates the birth in 1817 of the founder of the Baha'i faith.
- 
November Sunday 27
Advent Sunday (Christian)
 The beginning of the ecclesiastical year on the Sunday closest to November 30. Advent is the season before Christmas - In Western Christendom, four Sundays are included. In Eastern Christendom, the season is longer
- 
December Wednesday 21
Hanukkah (Jewish)
 Hanukkah is the Festival of Lights and marks the restoration of the temple by the Maccabees in 164 BCE. Hanukkah is celebrated at roughly the same time as Christmas, but there is no connection at all between the festivals.
- 
December Thursday 22
Winter Solstice - Yule (Pagan)
 Yule is the time of the winter solstice, when the sun child is reborn, an image of the return of all new life born through the love of the Gods. Within the Northern Tradition Yule is regarded as the New Year.
- 
Dec Sunday 25
Christmas Day (Christian)
 The day when Western Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.



Gandhi's 'Nonviolence' Legacy discussed at 'Gandhi Day' event

It wasn't the kind of birthday party with colorful balloons and a big cake, but it was a birthday celebration with music, food and plenty of reflection to go around. October 2 is Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, also appropriately observed as the United Nations International Day of Nonviolence. And this year, The Edinburgh Inter Faith Association jumped at the opportunity to hold its Annual Lecture and Civic Reception on the 2nd of October at the City Chambers. The afternoon event opened beautifully with Bani Bhattacharya singing a few of Gandhi's favorite songs. Then the Hon. Consul General of India, Mr. Anil Kumar Anand and other guest speakers,

Lord Charles Bruce, a descendent of the Lord's Elgin who were Viceroys of India, reflected on the life and influence of Gandhi while the Rev Prof Frank Whaling spoke on the important relevance of Mahatma Gandhi today.

Finally, Mr. Thubten Samdup, Representative of His Holiness The Dalai Lama for Northern Europe and the Baltic States, emphasized the importance of learning from other faith traditions, and how, in fact, the Dalai Lama himself turns to interfaith dialogue for inspiration. He expanded on this by pointing out how shared values and ethics and moral principles create a starting point for the betterment of humanity and religious harmony.

In closing, Mr. Samdup shared Gandhi's influence on the Dalai Lama's deep belief that commitment to a path of non-violence is the only way forward for humanity.



Dr Bahuguna demonstrating the Charkha (spinning wheel)

A civic reception hosted by The Deputy Lord Provost, followed the lecture. Over refreshments, guests found opportunity to converse with one another and observe a demonstration of Charkha (a spinning wheel - both a tool and symbol of the Indian independence movement) by Dr. Nandini Bahuguna.

When asked how Gandhi's teachings can be transformed into practical action for us today, Mr. Thubten Samdup suggested writing to the media and political leaders in support of those who practice non-violence.



Photo: (Left) Mr Thubten Samdup Representative of His Holiness The Dalai Lama (centre) Deputy Lord Provost Cllr Rob Munn and (right) Lord Charles Bruce

Dialogue Matters

You are responsible, first and foremost, for yourself. When you enter into dialogue, you represent yourself and often something greater. So how do you present yourself such that you do justice to your values and community?



Sohaib Saeed

Every group needs to encourage the right people to come forward for dialogue. They are people who have the required qualities and skills, who believe in dialogue and will act faithfully. They have the potential to build bridges; indeed, to *be* bridges.

The personal touch makes all the difference. So many tense situations can be defused with a smile, and body language can be used to achieve a good portion of communication. Before we even get to that stage, taking care of appearances helps make a good impression. Observe cultural courtesies, while bearing in mind that cultures vary. Don't be easily offended or terrified of offending: make things easy for each other so you can all get to the point.

It works best to lay things on the table early on. Introduce yourself and talk about what you want to achieve from this dialogue. What is your particular interest in the issue, and what do you bring to it? It is fine to be partisan, but not to feign objectivity while leaving relevant interests undeclared.

To define something is to say what makes it unique,

so presenting ourselves means addressing aspects of difference between our standpoints. Still, to get there, it makes sense to start with the commonalities that put the differences into perspective.

Learning about others and their beliefs allows me to tailor my self-presentation to be as effective as it can be for those listeners. ("Like you, we believe in..." or "In contrast to what you described, our worship consists of...") This sort of feedback also shows that we are listening and learning, and ensures that any misunderstandings can be addressed by the relevant people.

You may think that "yourself" would be the easiest topic to present. Yet it can be challenging to open up to others, to put into words things that have hitherto remained unspoken realities, and to explain or justify beliefs and practices that always seemed obvious. Still, if you don't present yourself, who will?

Next time: Dealing with Feeling. For the archive of columns, see www.dialogic.ws