



# Concord

LEEDS INTERFAITH FELLOWSHIP

[www.concord-leeds.org.uk](http://www.concord-leeds.org.uk)

Newsletter - April 2010

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## ***Multi-faith Chaplaincy in HM Armed Forces***

**T**HE first meeting of 2010 was held in a new (to Concord) venue—the Multi Faith Centre at Allerton High School. We are grateful to Jane Abramson and Cllr Feldman for their help in booking this facility.

The former Chaplain General, the Revd David Wilkes, came along to tell us about the introduction of a multi-faith chaplaincy in HM Armed Forces. He started by telling his personal story of involvement and explained that the chaplain is essentially a fellow-soldier, there to provide pastoral, moral and spiritual support for service men and women. In many instances soldiers are not interested

in the denomination, they simply need someone they can trust and turn to. Over the years chaplains had become 'denomination blind' although when a specific service was needed they would find the appropriate person to fulfil it. They became skilled facilitators, with respect at the heart of their practice. When the time came to appoint chaplains of other faiths they also had to be prepared to accept this principle of respect. Somewhat surprisingly, all the faiths signed up to it. Chaplains in the Army, it would seem, are leading the way among faith leaders in mutual respect and understanding.



*David Wilkes, Trevor Bates, Jane Abramson*

# Preaching to the Converted

A reflection on Dr Elizabeth Harris' keynote address: *Interfaith Encounter: luxury or necessity?*

ON 23rd March Concord was delighted to welcome Dr Elizabeth Harris as keynote speaker to the first Peter Bell Memorial Lecture. The event, kindly hosted by Leeds Methodist Mission, attracted an audience of more than sixty people from a range of faiths. Hopefully this initial support will flourish following the success of this year's lecture and the event will become a hotly anticipated date in Concord's calendar for many years to come.

Dr Harris's lecture set an impressive standard. Formerly the National Secretary for Inter-faith Relations for the Methodist Church in the UK, Dr Harris is now a senior lecturer at Liverpool Hope University, and President of the European Network of Buddhist and Christian Studies. An expert in Buddhist Studies, she has an impressive bibliography of academic texts to her name. Dr Harris is Methodist by religious conviction. The knowledge and respect with which she spoke about these two religions demonstrated a genuine commitment to interfaith relations, giving Dr Harris's talk compelling authenticity. Two overseas events shaped her attitude towards interfaith—and intercultural—dialogue. Experiences in Africa working as a teacher alongside Rastafaris cemented the value of intercultural encounters for her. This was later followed by seven years in Sri Lanka researching Buddhism, which she describes as 'life-changing'.

Dr Harris began by quoting from King Ashoka's 12th Major Rock Edict. An acclaimed Indian ruler of the third century BCE, Ashoka famously renounced violent warfare for a rule of pacifism inspired by Buddhist ethics of non-violence. The world has witnessed the rise of many different



religions since Ashoka's time. His message remains pertinent; when we denigrate another's religion, we denigrate our own.

'On each occasion one should honour another man's sect, for by doing so one increases the influence of one's own sect and benefits that of the other man; while by doing otherwise one diminishes the influence of one's own sect and harms the other man's. [...] Therefore, concord is to be commanded, so that men may hear one another's principles and obey them. '

[A Translation of the Edicts of Asoka.

Available at [www.katinkahesselink.net/tibet/asoka1.html#12th\\_Majo](http://www.katinkahesselink.net/tibet/asoka1.html#12th_Majo)]

For more contemporary British expressions of interfaith experience we need to skip forward to the 1970s when key movers in British Christianity, many of whom were Methodist, took the brave step of looking beyond the confines of their own religious communities.

Amongst these was Dr Peter Bell, who was one of the founders of Concord in 1976. A purpose of interfaith relations was to encourage an attitude of inclusion for all faiths in predominantly Christian Britain. Interfaith Network UK was established in 1987, giving interfaith dialogue an official face. Today the government recognises the role of religion in community cohesion and the importance of interfaith as a dynamic aspect of this agenda. People increasingly have hyphenated cultural and religious identities and are finding new ways of experiencing religion that fits contemporary plural society.

Whilst interfaith encounters invite religious rejuvenation for many, it is not without its difficulties. Early supporters of interfaith were a vocal minority amongst a resistant Christian majority sceptical of the merits of interfaith. Interfaith encounters require us not only to look outwards, towards the world of the other, but also to gaze inwards; and Christianity endured growing pains so often associated with intensive, internal reflection. Accommodating the validity and truth claims of other religions requires hermeneutical and theological readjustment that can be discomfiting. Welcoming other religions to share social space takes courage, as many feared—and continue to fear—the loss of Britain’s Christian public identity.

Dr Harris summarised three reasons that necessitate interfaith encounter in today’s society:

1. **Face and redress the complexity of history:** Our understanding of our own and other people’s histories is often limited, which can result in shallow, knee-jerk responses—or worse in racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Interfaith encounters help to breakdown the barriers of misunderstanding and foster forgiveness where it’s due.
2. **Individual, spiritual progress:** The religions we encounter through

interfaith have the capacity to help us towards an understanding of Truth. Each religion, having been shaped by its own cultural environment, can provide a new lens for the perception of humanity and divinity.

3. **Secular, spiritual society:** Secularisation fosters religious rejuvenation as people can adopt a religion of their own choosing. The confidence arising from a strong, personal religious conviction can lead to fruitful interfaith dialogue.

Dr Harris explained that interfaith encounter can be face-to-face (or faith-to-faith), where we share our religious beliefs and experiences directly with each other, or side-by-side, where people of different faiths work together for a common cause. A glance through Concord’s events calendar shows that we enjoy both these expressions of interfaith encounter and that Dr Harris is, very much, preaching to the converted. No wonder she received such a warm response.

*Emma Salter*

## Inter Faith Week 21-27 November

The aims of Inter Faith Week are:

- to strengthen good inter faith relations at all levels;
- to increase awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the UK, in particular celebrating and building on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society; and
- to increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious belief.

The Week is being led by the Inter Faith Network for the UK, working with its member bodies. It will be community-led, with local people and groups of different backgrounds holding their own events and highlighting work going on to promote understanding between people of different faiths and beliefs.

# CYNTHIA DICKINSON

(Interviewed by Trevor Bates on 2nd March 2010)

CYNTHIA sees her life so far as running in 19-year periods. The first period of her life she lived with her parents and siblings in South Leeds. There she attended a Sunday School connected with St Mary's Church of England, Beeston. She drifted from that influence because for her the teaching 'did not make sense'. So with a friend she began to attend the Salvation Army in West Hunslet and remained for several years until she went to Teacher Training College at Sheffield.

Throughout her teenage years doubts and questions arose in her mind about Christian beliefs, about proselytising and about the sinister side of church history. It was whilst she was at the Salvation Army that she met Gerry—her husband-to-be—and going to Teacher Training College brought the first period of her life—the 'Christian period'—to an end.

Her second period of 19 years was a time of non-involvement with any religious group, and she sees it as a time of 'spiritual wilderness'. She started teaching at Bramley Broad Lane Infants School in 1966, and was married to Gerry after one year. She then transferred to Ninelands Lane Primary School, Garforth, where they lived until they bought their present home at Crofton, Wakefield in 1971.

This 'spiritual wilderness' period became acute after Cynthia and her family moved to Crofton, and Robert and Stefanie started school. Whilst she preferred to remain a full-time mother, the emptiness had to be dealt with, so she bought a horse and called her 'Caramac' (the colour of a well-known chocolate!) This proved not to be the answer to her searchings, and during the

## Profile

*8th in a series of interviews  
with members of Concord*



three years her situation did not improve; if anything it got worse.

However, arising from a meeting with two teacher friends, her curiosity was sharpened on learning about tarot card reading. This interest led her through a whole series of contacts, not just locally but also nationally. Reading 'Prediction' magazines led her to join a green circle in Bradford and also to undertake a tarot card reading course. It was almost as if she was being 'pushed' into this interest!

1983 saw Cynthia out of her second 19-year period and into her third, her 'Pagan period'. For her one of the most fascinating and meaningful aspects of the tarot card philosophy and spirituality was

that Light and Dark had equal value, and there were celebrations of the Darkness as well as Light in Pagan practices. She found that declaring herself a Pagan brought some resolution to her spiritual searchings. However, the fact that 'Pagan' and 'Paganism' were surrounded by negative and (for some people) frightening implications opened up for her a time with several hurdles to be overcome. It needs to be said that her husband and her children were not involved in these new adventures, but after the initial 'shock' have all been very supportive.

Cynthia discovered that whilst Pagan spirituality emphasised feminism, she was not inclined to become a feminist militant herself, preferring to follow rather than lead, working quietly in the background. However, she has been convinced for a long time that motherhood is not highly rated in our society, and strongly believes that there are feminine qualities which should be valued.

Cynthia joined the Pagan Federation in 1989. Soon she became Regional Coordinator and the first non-Wiccan on the Pagan Federation Council. By 1990 the Pagan Federation developed a national network requiring officers and an admin team and local activists. The President of the Pagan Federation in conversation with Brian Pierce of the Inter-Faith Network discovered that for the PF to be included with the Inter-Faith Network it was necessary for Pagans to be involved more locally first. This proved to be the encouragement for her to become involved here in Leeds and she joined Concord in the Summer 1994 and has been with us ever since.

She was invited to be the Chairperson in 2002, became our Secretary in 2004 and remains so to the present. She is undoubtedly the dynamic hub of Concord who serves us with warm personality, efficient administration, vital communications and positive

encouragement. She represents us with Treasures Revealed, Peace Link, Leeds Faiths Forum, Leeds Fair Trade Steering Group and the Inter-Faith Network. She works indefatigably to widen to influence of Concord and our aims and perhaps her lasting contribution is in introducing the annual Walks of Friendship linking faith communities together in local areas of Leeds each year.

Without Cynthia the present life of Concord would not be as healthy or as alive as it is and we rejoice in having her with us—and for many years to come.

## Treasures Revealed in Leeds

### Saturday May 1st to Sunday May 9th

**T**HERE will be another programme of events taking place during the first week of May, co-ordinated by a small group of volunteers and getting off to a good start with Concord's Walk of Friendship. Concord has also taken an active part in encouraging places other than Christian to get involved and this year, besides a Mosque, Gurdwara, Temple and stone circle there will be, for the first time, a Buddhist Centre and a Synagogue.



Brochures are available in the Tourist Information Centre at Leeds Railway Station and in the local libraries. Alternatively details of participating venues can be found on the Treasures Revealed website:

[www.treasuresrevealed.co.uk](http://www.treasuresrevealed.co.uk) under Festivals / Leeds.

## ***Patterns of Worship Pagan***



**T**HE last in the series on Patterns of Worship was a talk by Debra Scott of the Pagan Federation. She explained that 'Pagan' is an umbrella term covering many paths such as shaman, druid or witch. There is no absolute source of authority, no dogma, no creed, so Pagans tend to read, listen and learn all they can then think everything over and decide for themselves what to believe and what to do. Some join groups: others prefer to worship alone. Most would say they worship a divine energy, male and female, and celebrate the changing seasons. Many also embrace magic as part of their worship, interacting with gods and goddesses to affect events, while being mindful that all actions have consequences and being prepared to take responsibility. Rituals are usually performed in a circle, symbolically protected, and can include meditation, chanting, drumming and sharing food and drink appropriate for the occasion. Nature is important, so often Pagans will celebrate out of doors. There are eight main festivals observed by the majority, some groups also have monthly meetings at the full moon. The main thing is to be the best we can, to learn and progress.

## **Multi-Faith Community Clean-Up**

***Saturday April 24th 10am***

**W**HEN I walked the route for Concord's Walk of Friendship back in January I was very dismayed to see the amount of litter on the streets. Apparently some of the rubbish was left-over from the bin-men's strike, so the area was significantly worse than usual. It occurred to me that a multi-faith 'community clean-up' activity the week before our Walk of Friendship would get the different faith communities out together on a common cause and benefit the environment. With the help of Cllrs Penny Ewens and James Monaghan I made contact with the Environment Services, ordered litter-picking equipment and made arrangements with All Hallows Church and the Hindu Temple for refreshments.

I am hoping that people from the different faith communities will come out to help on the day and – just as importantly – join together for lunch.

*Cynthia Dickinson*

*Remembering Hiroshima  
and Nagasaki*

### **65th Anniversary Event**

**Mon 9th August 10.45am -11.30am**

Mayors for Peace monument, Park  
Square, Leeds, organised by

Leeds City Council Peacelink Group

Readings include the Hiroshima and Nagasaki Peace Declarations. A wreath will be laid and at 11.02 am, the time of the Nagasaki bomb blast, and there will be two minutes' silence.

## Tributes

### David Hick

(1936 – 2009)

**D**AVID Hick was born in Redcar, and grew up in Saltburn-on-Sea, which at that time was part of Yorkshire, and gives a clue to the pattern of David's interests in later life.

From leaving school he took up engineering and over the years became a civil engineer and gained further qualifications in Town Planning and an MSc in Transport Studies. After early retirement he continued as a part-time lecturer at Leeds Metropolitan University and Park Lane College.

David was brought up in a Methodist Christian family and he remained committed to his church, being an active member of the Chapel Allerton congregation to his death. His interest in amateur dramatics from schooldays enabled him, with others, to start the Drama Group at Chapel Allerton Methodist Church. He became a key worker in the ecumenical Two Hills Project, enabling funds to be raised to provide youth activities for youngsters in two poorer communities adjacent to the Chapel Allerton area. His dedication to this outreach work was acknowledged with an invitation for David and his wife, Jean, to be guests at the Queen's Golden Jubilee Garden Party at Harewood House in 2002.

David's interest in the wider spheres of life was marked by his membership of the Leeds Civic Trust and in pursuing a course in Islam which (together with his friendship with Peter Bell who belonged to the same church) led him, we believe, to take up membership with Concord and latterly to serve on our Executive Committee for some years.

Regrettably David did not enjoy the best of health in recent years and this hindered him from becoming more engaged with our programme and activities. However, his contribution to Concord was one of encouragement and support and for that he will be remembered with gratitude. David died in hospital on December 27th 2009. Some Concord members managed to get through the snow for his funeral service on January 5th.

To his family who cherish his memory and recall the many colourful and meaningful times in their lives together, we send our condolences.

### Elizabeth Bernheim

(1920 – 2010)

**W**E were greatly saddened to hear of the death of Elizabeth Bernheim on February 5th 2010. She will be greatly missed.

Despite the cold damp weather, about a dozen Concord members went to her funeral service and burial in the Jewish section of Harehills Cemetery on February 9th. Her niece spoke very movingly about Aunt Elizabeth, with special reference to her love of 'Christmas' celebrations—in an all-Jewish household! Interfaith in practice?

Elizabeth had been a member of Concord since 1980 and for many years served on the Committee or Council of Faiths. I (Cynthia) have two main memories of Elizabeth. The first is of her time-keeping, particularly at Committee meetings in Thomas Danby College when we had to vacate the building by 9pm and it was looking as if we might run over. My other abiding memory is of Elizabeth the helper, especially with refreshments. She was

*Continued overleaf*

always there to see that tea was served, pots were washed and everything restored to order. I hadn't realised how much we relied on her until the meeting in February when I made the tea but totally forgot about the clearing away and even left the tea, coffee etc behind when I went home. That wouldn't have happened had Elizabeth been around!

Elizabeth may have been small in size but she made up for it in energy and interest, as we learned from her Profile in the April 2008 edition of the newsletter. And although seriously ill throughout 2009, she hardly missed a meeting and never complained.

Perhaps it was the fact that Elizabeth had been a district nurse and midwife in Leeds for so long that she was able to be 'at home' in any gathering. Certainly she was always ready to converse with whoever she was next to at Concord meetings, so that newcomers soon experienced her openness and warmth. There is no doubt about the fact that Elizabeth was a fervent pioneer of the interfaith world of Leeds, and her memory will be treasured.

*Trevor Bates & Cynthia Dickinson*

## Interfaith Calendar of Festivals Summer 2010

### MAY

1	Beltane	<b>Pagan</b>
2	Lag B'Omer	<b>Jewish</b>
	12th Day of Ridvan	<b>Bahá'i</b>
8	World Fair Trade Day	
13	Ascension of Christ	<b>Christian</b>
19-20	Shavuot	<b>Jewish</b>
23	Pentecost/Whit Sunday	<b>Christian</b>
	Declaration of the Bab	<b>Bahá'i</b>
27	Buddha Day/Visakha Puja	<b>Buddhist</b>
29	Ascension of Baha'u'llah	<b>Bahá'i</b>
30	Trinity Sunday	<b>Christian</b>

### JUNE

3	Corpus Christi	<b>Catholic Christian</b>
16	Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev	<b>Sikh</b>
21	Solstice: Litha	<b>Pagan</b>

### JULY

5	Birthday of Guru Hargobind	<b>Sikh</b>
8	Lailat al Miraj	<b>Islam</b>
9	Martyrdom of the Bab	<b>Bahá'i</b>
13	Ratha Yatra	<b>Hindu</b>
15	Chokhor Duchon	<b>Tibetan Buddhist</b>
20	Tisha B'Av	<b>Jewish</b>
23	Birthday of Guru Har Krishen	<b>Sikh</b>

26	Lailat al Barai'ah	<b>Islam</b>
	Asalha Puja Day	<b>Buddhist</b>
27	Rains Retreat	<b>Theravadin Buddhist</b>

### AUGUST

	Whole month Raksha	<b>Brahma Kumari</b>
1	Lughnassad (Lammas)	<b>Pagan</b>
6	Transfiguration	<b>Christian</b>
11	Ramadan begins	<b>Islam</b>
15	Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary	<b>Catholic Christian</b>
24	Raksha Bandhan	<b>Hindu</b>

### SEPTEMBER

2	Krishna Janmashtami	<b>Hindu</b>
6	Laylat al Qadr	<b>Islam</b>
8-10	Rosh Hashanah (New Year)	<b>Jewish</b>
10	Eid al Fitr	<b>Islam</b>
11	Ganesha Chaturthi	<b>Hindu</b>
14	Holy Cross Day	<b>Christian</b>
18	Yom Kippur	<b>Jewish</b>
23-29	Sukkot	<b>Jewish</b>
23	Equinox Mabon	<b>Pagan</b>
29	St Michael & All Angels	<b>Christian</b>
30	Shemini Atzeret	<b>Jewish</b>

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