



# Concord

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

Newsletter - January 2015

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## Remembrance Sunday

**T**HE Leeds Civic Service of Remembrance has for many years included short readings by representatives of the five major faiths. This year all other faiths were represented by Concord with the words from the Interfaith Network's Millennium Statement of Commitment read by Cynthia Dickinson.

In a world scarred by the evils of war, racism, injustice and poverty, we offer this joint act of commitment as we look to our shared future.

We commit ourselves, as people of many faiths to work together for the common good, uniting to build a better society, grounded in values and ideals we share:

- community
- personal integrity
- a sense of right and wrong
- learning, wisdom and love of truth
- care and compassion
- justice and peace
- respect for one another, for the earth and its creatures

We commit ourselves in a spirit of friendship and co-operation

- to work together alongside all who share our values and ideals
- to help bring about a better world now and for generations to come.

Concord also provided a wreath, which was laid at the War Memorial by Jay Anderson.





# Women Peace-ing Together

## Concord's 40th Anniversary Banner

*by Cynthia Dickinson*

**W**ITH the Peace Cloth finished and having had its first outing at Concord's Peace Service, some of the ladies accepted an invitation to take part in Bradford Touchstone's Women Weaving Wisdom project. A small group met over five weeks in November and December at Jenny's home in Roundhay, where we started a rag rug with a dove-in-a-rainbow design. As we worked we shared stories of women who had influenced our lives and discussed ideas on wisdom and knowledge.

The rug is almost finished. We expect to complete it when we start our next series of workshops in Beeston:

Thursdays January 8th and 22nd at 10.00am in the Hamara Centre, Tempest Road

Mondays February 9th and March 2nd at 9.30am in the Asha Centre, Stratford Street

Monday March 16th at 2.00pm in St Mary's community centre, Beeston Town Street

What could be the final phase will take place in the Roundhay area from April till July.

We have some lovely ideas for the multi-faith, multi-cultural banner with plenty of scope for input from lots of ladies! We hope that as many of you as possible will find time to join in with one or two workshops where you could make suggestions on the design, work on the panels, provide materials, help with refreshments.

For more information contact Jenny on 0113 2664532 or Cynthia on 07586327822



# The Role of Religion in Policing

**D**R Alistair McFadyen, a special Constable as well as a lecturer in theology at the University of Leeds, gave an informative presentation about the changes in policing over the last ten years or so with particular reference to religious diversity. He spoke mainly from a general policing perspective but included personal opinions and anecdotes.

In the past diversity was seen mainly as a question of race or ethnicity (and still is with some policy-makers) but with the recognition of 'hate crimes' police became aware that religion often had to be taken into consideration, not only with regard to ethnic minorities. There could, for example, be attacks on gay men by evangelical Christians where it would not be enough to identify the perpetrators as White British. Competence in religious diversity has become essential at every stage of policing with sensitivity being internalised. This in itself can be a problem, especially if called to a place of worship where custom requires removal of shoes: if there is the likelihood of a fight or chase, officers will not take their boots off.



Community engagement, neighbourhood policing and working with partners has become increasingly important; efforts are made to engage with mosques, though not so much with churches. When police have been called out there is a follow-up procedure to check satisfaction, which impacts on the community's trust, including faith communities.

Tuning-in to the global within the local is another area for police awareness regarding the possibility of problems between faith communities and the general public. In the field of counter-terrorism or radicalisation, the police aim to prevent violence—not ideas or opinions—and encourage the democratic process and peaceful protest. This applies to extremism in white communities too.

Among the comments and questions were references to some cultural traditions (drug use, honour killings etc) that have caused problems and led to new laws. All in all we were left with the positive feeling that religious diversity is understood and taken seriously by our police force.

*Cynthia Dickinson*

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## Concord's Aims

**A**T an Extraordinary General Meeting held in November it was unanimously agreed that the aims of Concord should be reworded as follows:

- To advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in the Leeds Metropolitan District, and to nurture respect and friendly relations by facilitating interfaith dialogue and

organising educational and cultural events

- To promote and to work for justice, peace and social harmony for the public benefit in the multi-cultural Leeds Metropolitan District by advocacy, by focused public events and projects, and by co-operating with other organisations that have similar objectives.

This change in the wording of the Constitution requires the approval of the Charities Commission before it can be implemented, and that is still awaited.

# SHRI NIRANJAN J. VAKHARIA

**S**HRI Niranjan (Niru) Vakharia was born in Surat, India (the Silk City of India), the fourth child of eight siblings. The Vakharia family owned their own textile mill across three generations, and like his parents, Niru follows the Jain religion. At eight years old Niru went to live with relatives in Bombay where he received his early education until he matriculated at a Bombay Academy when 17 years old.

In 1964 he gained entrance to the MS (Maharaja Soyajirao) University in Baroda City, Gujarat, and graduated in 1971 with a degree in Textile Engineering. The following year he came to Leeds University and by 1975 gained a post-graduate Textile Industry Diploma. After gaining further qualifications from both the Manchester Institute and the Leeds Polytechnic he went to work as an engineer with A. Bywater (manufacturers of simulated fur fabric) in Huddersfield, who in 1983/4 merged with G. M. Marston. Niru bought an interest in this company and set up his own Leeds fabric printing company, developing and specialising in that particular printing process. He became qualified as a chartered technician and in 1987/8 sold his printing firm to a South African company, and then became self-employed.

Niru, given his background in engineering, started to specialise in the synchronisation of machinery and equipment and offered his services to the gas and electrical industry, and for some years was on call to the National Power Grid, retiring in 2011.

In 1978 he married Sushila, who, with her family, had migrated from East Africa

## Profile

**5th in a series of  
interviews with interfaith  
leaders in Leeds**

*Interviewed by Trevor Bates, 17th Nov  
2014, and amended by N. Vakharia*



to Huddersfield in the 1970s. They have three sons, who were given an excellent education and all three have gone into medicine: Hemant, (who is an obstetrician and gynaecologist), Vijay (a neurosurgeon) and Nilesh (a medical student), who all live in London.

In the year Niru came to Leeds (1972) he linked up with the Hindu community and offered to supervise the installation of the first central heating system in their community kitchen and dining hall at their premises on Alexandra Road. In 1979, whilst working in Huddersfield, he linked up with the Hindu Temple there also and assisted them with the upgrading of their premises. On returning to live in Leeds in 1980 he became a member of the Leeds Hindu Temple and was asked to serve on

their Management Committee. In 2005 he became Vice Chairperson and in the year 2006/7 became its Chairperson, and is so to the present time.

From October 1966 the Hindu community in Leeds functioned as an 'ad hoc Hindu cultural society', but as the years progressed there was greater need for a Hindu temple and community centre to be used as a place for their worship, celebrations and gatherings. In October 1969 they managed to purchase the property at 36 Alexandra Road, Leeds at a very reasonable price, formerly owned by The Salvation Army. Since then the Hindu community has raised funds to upgrade and enlarge their facilities to meet their growing needs.

The first stage was to improve the existing kitchen and dining hall facilities already in the premises. Then they focused on the major task of enlarging their prayer hall and building a marble temple, which was officially opened in 2000 at a cost of £400,000. The positive leadership of the Hindu community since then was able to raise a further £600,000 from their own people in order to construct a completely new two-storey community hall and dining hall facility capable of accommodating several hundred people for special occasions. In this third stage that Niru Vakharia gave freely of his technical knowledge and skills for the planning and installation of the central heating systems in this new building. It is evident that Niru has played an influential part with the Leeds Hindu Charitable Trust and the life of the Mandir since he became a member in 1980.

Niru became involved with Concord in the 1990s, believing in its aims, supporting its programmes and work, and served on the Concord Executive for several years. Shri Vakharia is also recognised in the wider Leeds community as a devout Hindu and Jain follower – a proud spokesman for his people and a reconciling worker in the local community.

## **Equalities Assembly Conference**

**O**VER 100 people from all walks of life gathered in the Banquet Room of Leeds Civic Hall on November 27th to hear reports from the Equalities Assembly Hub Representatives and the Leeds Youth Council. Jocelyn Brooks of Leeds Faiths Forum spoke on behalf of the Religion & Belief Hub and I added a short piece about Concord as a 'grass roots' interfaith organisation and the work being done by Women Peace-ing Together.

Community Committees have been formed to provide a forum for local people to raise issues with their elected councillors and have a say about what happens in their locality. We discussed how to get local people involved, acknowledging that many residents might not be aware of the meetings or reluctant to attend. Good publicity is essential. Evidence of success would be a positive inducement, so residents can see that their concerns are heard and problems resolved. Contacting places of worship to 'spread the word' was a suggestion, recognising that there are different 'communities of interest' within each local area.

We discussed how we could ensure that local people do have their say. The most important thing seemed to be finding out where and when the meetings would be held. Because the areas covered (ten in all) are rather large and made up of different neighbourhoods, the meetings need to move around. Again it was thought that places of worship could publicise notices of meetings and encourage members to attend, particularly if there were issues to raise - safety on the streets, service provision sensitive to different faiths and cultures, ways of improving the local environment.

It was also noted that the community committees can allocate money for local projects and activities.

Contact: [www.leeds.gov.uk/  
communitycommittee](http://www.leeds.gov.uk/communitycommittee)

*Cynthia Dickinson*

# Death & Beyond in Brahma Kumari and Jewish Thought

A fascinating and highly enjoyable evening in December was led by David Goodman and Rabbi Esther Hugenholtz, which prompted many questions and much discussion. One comment made was 'It's so refreshing to come to a meeting where we can talk about death so openly and without fear, as it's such a taboo subject.'

David clarified that the Brahma Kumaris' greeting of peace, 'Om Shanti', 'I am a peaceful soul', contains their basic understanding about death and beyond. The soul is eternal. It is quite distinct from the body. Moreover I am a soul: this is my body. It is not that I have a soul. The term 'death' therefore refers to death of the body not the soul. Therefore a belief in rebirth is a natural consequence of this understanding.

Rabbi Esther said Judaism is a life-affirming religion with a diversity of opinions on afterlife. She then took us through a fascinating 'chronology' of



Jewish thinking about death. She made the distinction between Early Biblical (the Torah) thinking, which has no reference to life after death, to later Biblical, Rabbinic and Mystical thinking where in the Kabbalah reincarnation is mentioned. Further, although many modern Jews will affirm the importance of the soul, many are agnostic on 'life after death'. In short 'Jews believe in life after birth' i.e. what we do here on earth is more important.

Both speakers agreed that regardless of my beliefs the important thing was: does my belief system help me live a better more compassionate life?

*Susan Balmforth*

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## *Faith in Fairtrade*

STUDENTS from the University of Leeds Theology and Religious Studies Department are planning some research into religion and Fairtrade. They will be looking for places of worship to visit and people of faith to interview. They are interested to discover how much leaders and lay people from churches, chapels, mosques, synagogues, temples, halls and meeting places know and do about Fairtrade and how many places of worship have Fairtrade status.

Fairtrade Fortnight—February 23rd to March 8th—is a time when those of us already involved make an extra effort to

spread the word about the value of Fairtrade from the producers' perspective: "Hear their stories, share their stories, change more lives."



Encourage others to think about fairness when shopping and look for the Fairtrade mark. If you don't already do so, change now, choose Fairtrade and make the world a better, fairer place.

You have the power to change the world every day.

For more information see [www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk)

# Interfaith Week November 16th - 22nd

ON Nov19th the Hamara Centre in Beeston, in partnership with the Leeds Muslim Youth Association, hosted an **Interfaith Day Fair** as part of Interfaith Week. Cynthia Dickinson took the Concord display boards to go alongside those of organisations (WY Police, healthcare providers etc) concerned with faith and cultural diversity.

Groups of local school children came to take part in various activities including Jewish bread-making, Sikh martial arts, Christian Christmas decorations and Islamic calligraphy.



Leeds Faiths Forum had a day of

**Faiths Working Together** in the Merrion Centre on November 20th, officially opened by the Lord Mayor of Leeds. Several Faith Schools provided choirs and Concord's pull-up banner was seen by everyone as the school children stood directly in front of



it to sing. Representatives of the different faiths gave demonstrations of their 'prayers' and members of the public, including the Lord Mayor, were invited to write short messages of hope for the large PEACE letters (from the City of Leeds School).

*Cynthia Dickinson*

# Calendar of Religious Festivals

## Spring 2015

Bahá'í and Jewish festivals usually begin at sundown on the previous evening

### JANUARY 2015

5 Mahayana New Year	<b>Buddhist</b>
Guru Gobind Singh birthday	<b>Sikh</b>
6 Epiphany	<b>Christian</b>
Feast of Theophany	<b>Orthodox Christian</b>
7 Feast of the Nativity	<b>Orthodox Christian</b>
13 Maghi	<b>Sikh</b>
18-26 Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity	<b>Christian</b>
18 Founder's Day	<b>Brahma Kumari</b>
19 World Religion Day	<b>Bahá'í</b>
24 Vasant Panchami	<b>Hindu</b>

### FEBRUARY

2 Candlemas / Presentation of Christ in the Temple	<b>Christian</b>
Imbolc	<b>Pagan</b>
4 Tu BiShvat	<b>Jewish</b>
15 Nirvana Day	<b>Buddhist</b>
17 Shrove Tuesday	<b>Christian</b>
18 Ash Wednesday, beginning of Lent	<b>Christian</b>
19 World Religion Day	<b>Bahá'í</b>
Chinese New Year	<b>Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist</b>
26 - March 1 Intercalary Days	<b>Bahá'í</b>

### MARCH

1 Orthodox Sunday	<b>Orthodox Christian</b>
Saint David's Day	<b>Christian</b>
2-20 Nineteen Day Fast	<b>Bahá'í</b>
5 Purim	<b>Jewish</b>
6 Holi	<b>Hindu</b>
Hola Mohalla	<b>Sikh</b>
17 St Patrick's Day	<b>Christian</b>
Maha Shivaratri	<b>Hindu</b>
20 Equinox, Ostara	<b>Pagan</b>
21 Naw Ruz (New Year)	<b>Bahá'í</b>
New Year	<b>Hindu</b>
21-28 Ramayana	<b>Hindu</b>
25 Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary	<b>Catholic Christian</b>
28 Ramanavami	<b>Hindu</b>
29 Palm Sunday, beginning of Holy Week	<b>Christian</b>

### APRIL

2 Maundy Thursday	<b>Christian</b>
3 Good Friday	<b>Christian</b>
4-11 Pesach (Passover)	<b>Jewish</b>
4 Theravadin New Year	<b>Buddhist</b>
Hanuman Jayanti	<b>Hindu</b>
5 Easter	<b>Christian</b>
Palm Sunday	<b>Orthodox Christian</b>
10 Holy Friday	<b>Orthodox Christian</b>
12 Pascha (Easter)	<b>Orthodox Christian</b>
14 Baisakhi - New Year	<b>Sikh</b>
16 Yom HaShoah	<b>Jewish</b>
21 First Day of Ridvan	<b>Bahá'í</b>
23 St George's Day	<b>Christian</b>
24 Yom Ha'Atzmaut	<b>Jewish</b>
29 Ninth Day of Ridvan	<b>Bahá'í</b>

## HELP!

Jay Anderson has had to withdraw from her role as Concord's Acting Secretary because of pressure of work, so we are again in the position of having no Secretary. We desperately need one or two people to help with either or both of two tasks:

- to attend about six two-hour meetings per year of the Executive Committee and make notes of key decisions

- to liaise with speakers and book a room as decided by the Committee for about ten public meetings per year.

If you think you could do either or both of these, even if only for a year or so, please get in touch with the Chair or the Editor (contact details below).

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