



Concord

LEEDS INTERFAITH FELLOWSHIP
www.concord-leeds.org.uk

Newsletter - January 2019

Concord Prays for Peace

THE CONCORD Annual Peace Service on October 24th in the Banqueting Room at the Civic Hall was a very pleasant and successful occasion. It followed the usual broad pattern, preceded by music and images provided by the Brahma Kumaris, and beginning with a brief keynote address and prayer led by the Lord Mayor, Cllr Graham Latty. The World Peace Flame, introduced by Sue Owen, provided the source from which a candle was lit on behalf of each

of the nine faiths represented in Concord. The Lady Mayoress, Cllr Pat Letty, lit a candle on behalf of all of the people of Leeds. There were readers from all of the faith traditions, who gave us an interesting variety of prayers, scriptural passages and reflections with the same fundamental human values and yearnings for peace coming through them all.

Two particular highlights made this Peace Service different and special.

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Early in the service students from Abbey Grange Academy gave us a brief but well-organised, focused and perceptive presentation of what the word 'peace' meant to them and what a peaceful world would be like. They spoke confidently and clearly. The presentation included an eloquent and well-constructed poem and concluded with a very appropriate prayer. We appreciated their input and the work of their Chaplain, Kay Brown, in helping them to construct and present it.

The second highlight came towards the end of the service from a professional young jazz composer and singer, Parriss Elektra, a member of the Hare Krishna movement in Hinduism. She sang a Hare Krishna mantra and then one of her own distinctively original songs, accompanying herself on the electric guitar. Her pure, clear singing voice, polished musical performance and evident spiritual commitment expressed through song were uplifting and inspiring. St Augustine said, 'whoever sings prays twice'. It was certainly true of her welcome contribution to our worship.

The Lord Mayor wrote appreciatively afterwards, saying 'it was something that we have never experienced before and not



only did we thoroughly enjoy the evening but both felt that we had gained from meeting such lovely people.'

The attendance was better this year than it has been in previous years, and nearly £100 (which Concord made up to £100) was collected for the Lord Mayor's Appeal on behalf of St Gemma's Hospice.

Pictures taken by David Goodman, the full programme with the names of participants, the text of the readings and the script of the Abbey Grange students can all be found on the Concord website.

Bahá'ís and Christians Find Common Ground on Issues of Violence

THE SECOND session in our ongoing series on religious attitudes towards violence explored Bahá'í and Christian perspectives. Our speakers at the Quaker Meeting House in September were Mehran Nassiri, leader of the Leeds Assembly of Bahá'ís, and Canon Sam Corley, the Rector of Leeds. Both of the speakers gave us concise, clear, cogent, insightful and thought-provoking introductions.

The aim of Bahá'í, said Mehran Nassiri, was the unity of humankind, so obviously violence is something to be deplored. Human beings have animal needs like other animals, but also distinguishing virtues, like love, kindness, generosity, humility, which are to be nourished. The soul needs divine nourishment to develop the virtues. Three principles are fundamental: to accept that there is one creator; to acknowledge that all

religions derive from one source; to recognise that all humankind, despite differences, are the same. There should not be conflict. We travel as companions in one ship, even if we are in different cabins. We need to accept one another and nourish the virtues that will eventually remove conflict and war.

Sam Corley acknowledged that violence is often caused by religion and that there is diversity of approaches among Christians, which can be characterised simplistically as pacifist (avoiding conflict), crusader (fighting for a greater good) and a justice approach (accepting violence as necessary to combat a greater evil). Violence is as old as humanity, and damages the victim, the perpetrator and the earth itself. It occurs when individual separateness is emphasised over community. A Christian response should be to turn the other cheek, not allowing oneself to be a doormat nor allowing one's own humanity to be diminished. Christians look to the example of Jesus. The cross is a symbol both of violence and of a triumph over violence, because through forgiveness and love Jesus drained the worst violence could do.

These addresses stimulated some challenging questions and comments from the floor about, for example, why God allows violence and does not intervene to prevent war, and whether violence is unavoidable. The Bahá'í response was that God has given us freedom of choice, and humanity has to learn to become mature and choose wisely. The world is developing; the United Nations has potential but hasn't existed for long; in a less than perfect world violence may be necessary to ensure justice; in time we should grow out of it.



Christianity came in for some trenchant criticism from one visitor who asked why Christians thought they could be forgiven and go to heaven whilst people of all other religions would go to hell regardless of how good they were. He was assured that that was not the belief of all Christians, and certainly not that of Christians engaged in interfaith dialogue.

It was a very good session, well attended and enriching. We are very grateful to our two speakers and to David Randolph-Horn, who chaired the meeting.

John S. Summerwill

Leeds City Council Religion or Belief Hub

It was announced at the November meeting that two events have been planned for 2019.

On Friday February 8th there will be a *Young People in Faith* event at the Emmanuel Centre and on Tuesday March 26th it will be *Women in Faith* in Leeds Civic Hall.

For further information contact leedsfaith@leeds.gov.uk or geoffrey.turnbull@leeds.gov.uk

Leeds Faith Leaders and Climate Change

ALTHOUGH not a faith leader, nor even a Leeds resident, I attended an event for Leeds Faith Leaders on November 28th at the Leeds Church Institute. The evening started well with an excellent vegan buffet, a good first step on the road to saving the planet.

There were three very different presentations: Sustainable Energy & Climate Change, Spiritual Ecology and Leeds City Council.

The first presentation, by Dr Tom Knowland, included an introduction to the general situation in Leeds, some facts about climate change, then a look at what Leeds is doing to reduce its carbon emissions.

Next was Noel Moules, who defined spiritual ecology as the feeling of belonging, connection and kinship with the whole of nature. He then took us on a whistle-stop tour through some of the worlds faiths and their climate/ecology activists.

The last speaker was Cllr Judith Blake, leader of Leeds City Council, who started by saying we are living in dangerous times and asking all Leeds citizens to do their bit including to “be disruptive”. She then focused on caring for the people of Leeds and providing children with a safe future.

The whole event was recorded and can be heard on the podcast link below:

<https://lcileeds.wordpress.com/2018/12/01/how-can-leeds-do-more-to-tackle-climate-change-podcast/>

Finally we were each given a card and asked to make a pledge regarding climate change; it could be to raise awareness, take action, be an advocate, lead your faith community or network. My pledge was to “find out about carbon emissions and encourage others to look at, discuss and improve”. (That last word should have been ‘reduce’!)

Once home I measured my personal carbon footprint at <https://footprint.wwf.org.uk/>. I recommend that you do the same, then see what steps you need to take to get your score closer to zero. You might find yourself outside your ‘comfort zone’ but if we want future generations (such

as your grandchildren) to have a safe and sustainable planet, then we need to make changes, and make them now.

I also read quite a bit about the climate crisis, the emergency facing us, and wondered why this hadn’t been stressed at the Climate Event. In the presentation about Leeds we were told that the plan is for carbon emissions to be reduced by 80% in the year 2050. Emissions then will be around one million tonnes of CO². But scientists are telling us that we need to get as near to zero as possible by 2030 (or sooner) if we are to avoid environmental disasters.

The talk on spiritual ecology was very positive, reminding us that all faiths include care for the Earth. But there was nothing to indicate any sense of urgency in the present situation nor any advice on practical actions that faith leaders need to implement. And although Cllr Blake mentioned ‘dangerous times’ and ‘doing our bit’, there were no clues as to what dangers we face nor what bits we need to do.

As I mentioned at the start, the buffet provided was vegan, and excellent, but there was no encouragement to discuss faith and food as we enjoyed the meal. This was a shame because the easiest start we can make towards reducing carbon emissions on a personal level is to reduce—or even stop—eating meat. Half the world’s surface is being used for growing animal fodder and in the process destroying forests that would absorb carbon dioxide. There are about a billion head of cattle in the world today, giving off methane that is a far worse greenhouse gas than CO².

Other areas to look at are home energy use, travel, and things we buy.

We must also tell the media we need to read/hear/see the truth about the climate emergency and demand that politicians pull out all the stops to end the crisis and make this a zero carbon country—sooner rather than later.

Together we can be powerful.

Cynthia Dickinson

Fairtrade Yorkshire Conference & Fairtrade Fortnight

AT THE Fairtrade Yorkshire conference, held in the University of Leeds in mid September, I was asked to give a short presentation on Fairtrade in Leeds places of worship.

I had some excellent information from the 2015 Religious Mapping of Fairtrade in Leeds by students from the Theology and Religious Studies Dept. Things don't seem to have changed much since then. Virtually all the places of worship that have Fairtrade status are Christian, with Sinai Synagogue being the only non-Christian venue.

I was able to report that a young Sikh, Amarjit Birdi, had tried introducing Fairtrade to the GNNSJ Gurdwara in Beeston and won the Fairtrade Foundation Campaign Award for Best Outreach and Networking in 2013. She had translated the Fairtrade pamphlets into Punjabi and taken them, along with a stall of Fairtrade products, to several other gurdwaras in the city.

Other presentations were given by the Revd Matt Wright of Lister Hills Baptist Church and Robert Keeble from the Quaker Meeting

House, sharing stories of their successes and challenges.

Although people of all faiths agree that Fairtrade is easily compatible with their ethos, only a fraction of the churches and, with one exception, no other places of worship in Leeds, actually have Fairtrade status. A significant drawback is that achieving and maintaining Fairtrade status takes time and effort, and in most places there are too few people doing too many jobs.

We are fast approaching Fairtrade Fortnight (February 25th to March 10th) when groups all over the country will be raising awareness of and promoting Fairtrade.

If your place of worship is already involved, Leeds Fairtrade steering group would love to hear about your plans and give them publicity on social media. Or if your place of worship would like to find out about or do something around Fairtrade, get in touch with Leeds Fairtrade and we will try to help.

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Holocaust Memorial Day Remembrance Event

Sunday 27th January 2019, 2.00pm Leeds Town Hall

JOIN the Lord Mayor of Leeds to commemorate the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust, and the millions of people killed under Nazi persecution, and in the genocides which followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. The event will respond to the Holocaust Memorial Day theme 'Torn from Home', and will include a speech by Apollinaire Kageruka, survivor of the Rwanda genocide, to mark its 25th anniversary.

There will be a performance of 'The Library' by Playhouse Youth—a cross-age and inclusive company which presents tales from real people affected by the Holocaust. Together their ensemble learns about the past, and is looking forward to a time that won't relive the heartache around the world. They have looked at the topics home, displacement, families and loss,

responding to the theme, 'Torn From Home'. The company will create a performance for Holocaust Memorial Day, featuring music, movement, and the most imaginative storytelling, set inside a library of forgotten stories.

Music will be performed by the choir Kolot Hazichoron – Voices of Hope.

There will also be a reading of the seven statements of commitment with candle lighting by representatives of different groups persecuted including Holocaust survivors, people with additional needs, the LGBT* community and Remembering Srebrenica. The event will close with a traditional Hebrew memorial prayer sung by the President of Bradford Synagogue, Rudi Leavor, BEM.

Free and open to all. No booking required.

Interfaith Theology

Mahinda Palihawandana

Mahinda Palihawandana, Professor in Sri Lanka, argues in 'A Buddhist Response: Religion Beyond Ideology and Power' that faiths can undergo improvement through religious encounter.

BOTH in the East and West, religious societies present a rather perplexing picture today. We are all aware of the familiar signs of 'sickness' in these societies: erosion of observance, slackening of faith, loss of prestige of the elites, and so on.

Yet, this is only one side of the picture. On the other side, we have evidence of their basic strengths that have elicited profound attachments. Each one of them has come to be viewed as a treasured possession by its adherents and has in turn conferred on them a sense of identity and a civilizing worldview. Their toughness of fibre is demonstrable by their resilience and adaptability. At issue, then, is not whether religious societies are becoming extinct, but rather this problem: Which is the more significant, their signs of sickness or their continuing dynamism?

These two together, however, hardly leave in doubt the fact that religious societies have the will to live and the hope of continued life, even though there is turmoil in their souls. In the reservoir of power that the religious societies represent, the positive factor is this will to live. But the turmoil in the soul indicates the presence of a negative factor as well: elements of weakness that new challenges have brought into consciousness (pp. 34-5)

Though each of the religions has provided a worldview by which men and women lived, can anyone of them claim to be perfect? They have all failed in one way

or another. Most notably, they have failed to make people live up to their ideals. So the challenge of the other religions may make us ask ourselves: Are our ideals unattainable or unrealistic? Have we somewhere in our history failed to take note of important aspects of the tradition? How to account for our obvious failures?

Buddhists, noting that Christian societies generally have been the pioneers in advancing to massive economic successes, in eradicating disease, in achieving technological triumphs, might conceivably feel that they should seriously examine the Christian critique of what has been regarded as Buddhist pessimism, or even the basic position accorded to *dukkha* (woe or suffering) in the Buddhist view of humanity. It may be argued that it is 'constitutionally' difficult for Buddhists to develop an attitude of conquering nature and of facing up to the intractable challenges of hunger, disease, deprivation, etc. Will the Buddhists accept this criticism meekly, without a serious re-examination of the meaning of the doctrine of *dukkha*? Obviously not. No one can forecast what such re-examination will bring. But whatever it brings, it is likely to lead to religious revitalization, either via healthy changes or via healthy rediscoveries or both.

Academic students of religion have hardly to be told that in their long histories the religions have undergone more changes, or more drastic changes, than the faithful are likely to concede. It remains a task for future religious consciousness to admit this fact squarely and to be ready to take the consequences. Some fear that granting respectability to a principle of change in religious viewpoints and attitudes will be self-destructive. But, in fact, the recognition of 'changing religion' may contribute to a religion's survival, as probably it was in this way they actually survived.

I think then that by religious change, the great traditions strengthen one another by various forms of 'cross-fertilization'. Attitudes and teachings cannot be bodily taken from one tradition and planted in

another, but the strengths of one tradition may become the 'conductive factor' for another tradition to examine itself. Through this interaction traditions may generate new strengths in terms of their own resources.

Thus it seems to me probably that in the next stage of the encounter of religions each tradition will internally wrestle with the weak or 'negative' side of its development. At that stage, it should appear to each tradition that it owes a serious duty to itself to inquire: 'What have we to propose to humankind? Has humankind seriously taken account of what our tradition has been proposing? Have we been taking what was proposed in the past seriously

enough? Or have we drifted on to a less serious course of action, or even moved in the opposite direction?' As each tradition reviews itself, there will be at least three important 'negative developments' for each tradition to cope with internally: (1) dogmatism, (2) institutionalism, and (3) alliance with power and wealth. Religious traditions must learn to divest themselves of these 'cankers' in order to advance to a new creative phase. (pp. 36-7)

Mahinda Palihawandana, 'A Buddhist Response: Religion Beyond Ideology and Power', in Donald G. Dawe and John B. Carman, *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986).

Leeds City Peacelink Group

AT THE October Peacelink there was a suggestion from Linda Strickler that Leeds could aim to become a City of Peace. Cllr Blackburn agreed to get more information to share with the groups in January.

Concord had invited members to the Peace Service and suggested that individuals could make peace symbols for the November Armistice display in Brodrick Hall.

Sue Owen reported that the World Peace Flame in Garforth continues to do well and the neighbouring villages of Scholes and Barwick are keen to have something similar. She also told of peace activities in local primary schools and their plan for the children to have a Peace Flame lantern walk on November 8th as part of Armistice commemorations.

Leeds Quakers had invited members of Peacelink to attend the laying of a white Peace Poppy wreath on Sunday November 11th at the peace pole in the Quaker Meeting House garden. After lunch a white and red poppy wreath had been taken to lay at the War Memorial in Victoria Gardens, remembering all victims of war, civilian as well as military.

The 2019 International Peace Lecture will be held on Tuesday February 5th at

7pm in Leeds Civic Hall. Paul Rogers, Emeritus Professor of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, will talk on *Routes to Peace in an Uncertain World*. This is a free event and open to all.

Any group or organisation with a peace ethos is welcome to attend the Leeds City Peacelink Group meetings, which are held in the Civic Hall every two or three months. For further information contact Cllr.David.Blackburn@leeds.gov.uk



Women Peace-ing Together



by Cynthia
Dickinson

AT OUR October meeting in the Leeds Central Library's Art section we completed a peace banner for the museum display—Armistice and After—and discussed the idea of creating a second banner. Lucy Moore, the museum curator responsible for the Armistice project, brought a selection of peace items from the Museum Discovery Centre for inspiration.

Zarina, a Muslim member of the group, had been to Mecca on Haj and brought a beautiful personalised album to show us. Looking at the photographs and listening to her account was a very moving experience for all of us.

In November Agnis, the community project facilitator, came along to help us

complete the second banner so she could take that and the other items—banner, individual peace symbols, name bunting and the rainbow peace cloth we use for our Peace Service—for the Armistice display.

On Saturday November 10th we went along to the launch of Peace in Leeds, a commemoration of the Armistice and After with hundreds of peace symbols covering the floor and dozens of banners hanging from the balcony of the Brodrick Hall in Leeds City Museum. We were delighted to see our table cloth in the centre of the display with our other decorative symbols, including the Women Peace-ing Together bunting, close by.



As I now have other commitments for Mondays, Hannah and Jaswant will be contacts for the group, which will continue to meet on the first Monday of the month from 10.30am to 12.30pm. They have decided to start by making baby clothes for charity and will be considering other projects, activities or visits for the future.

If you would like to pop in and join the group project or take your own work to do, or just stop by for a chat, you will be most welcome.

Cynthia Dickinson

Oct group & banner 1



Nov group & banner2

Zarina & album

Nov work with Agnis



Light for Leeds

CONCORD once again made a valuable contribution to the multi-faith event organised by Leeds City Museum staff in the visitor centre and ruins of Kirkstall Abbey. Several members of the Concord Executive took part in this celebration of national Interfaith Week, hosting stalls and providing activities. The visitor centre was bright and cheerful with faith and interfaith stalls, most of which offered seasonal and traditional food to visitors (and other stall-holders).

The nave and chapter house in the abbey ruins were havens of peace and tranquillity.

As well as celebrating the religious diversity of Leeds, the event also incorporated a commemoration of the Armistice and our hopes for a peaceful future—*Faith in Peace and War*. In recognition of contributions from different nationalities, faiths and cultures in the First World War, Suman Kaur, winner of the Big Painting Challenge 2017, had been commissioned to paint four portraits. One was 'Woodbine Willie' (the Revd Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy), a Christian chaplain, well known to the people of Leeds. Another was Marcus Bailey, an Afro-Caribbean sailor and war hero in the British Navy. Then there was Sophie Dulep Singh, a Sikh nurse and suffragette and last but not least, Khudad Khan, a Muslim soldier in the British Army who served on the Western Front and was awarded the Victoria Cross for gallantry. The portraits could be seen in the visitor centre while life-size cut-outs were displayed along the length of the nave.

During the afternoon, at the far end of the nave, we were treated to some very moving

excerpts from a new requiem, *Penthos*, composed to commemorate the centenary of the Armistice and performed by the St Peter's Singers.

The weather was excellent and hundreds of people from near and far visited the abbey. Some took part in the meditative walks led by the Brahma Kumaris; children were encouraged to make Christingles and complete a simple multi-faith quiz; paper candles were available for writing messages of peace to hang on the Tree of Hope in the chapter house. Then there was carol singing led by Patrick and Edward as well as musical performances from young Sikh instrumentalists and songs from a Jewish male voice choir.

As dusk fell we had a candle-lit procession, following the World Peace Flame, to the chapter house, where we said words for peace in different languages. The event finished with a few moments of peaceful silent reflection around the Tree of Hope.

Our thanks to Patrick, Gabrielle, Lucy and their museum team for another excellent event.

Cynthia Dickinson





A slideshow of photos can be seen on the Concord website.

Sikh & Muslim Musical Traditions

GURMUKH SINGH DEAGON welcomed Concord members and other guests to the Ramgarhia Sports Centre for an evening of music in November given by Sikh and Muslim musicians. He thanked the Ramgarhia Board and the Management Committee for giving Concord use of the Centre free of charge.

Gurmukh explained how Sikhism has always been inclusive and music has been an important element in it since it was founded by Guru Nanak, whose 550th birthday Sikhs had just celebrated.

Guru Nanak's constant companion for some 54 years was the musician Bhai Mardana Ji. He was a Sufi Muslim who played an instrument called the rabab, which few people play any longer.

Sikh musicians

Shej Singh played on the taus, a Punjabi bowed string instrument, invented by Guru Hargobind,



the sixth Guru of the Sikhs. Manjodh Singh Dhanjal played the tabla, which is a pair of drums that are beaten with the hands.

At the start of a music session a chant is played first, followed by an *alapp* also known as *mangle charn*. This sets the scene for the recital of a stanza from the Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

The actual *shabad* (stanza) recited was as follows:

'O my tongue, sing the praises of the Lord. Abandon all other tastes and flavours; the taste of the Naam, the Name of the Lord, is so sublime. ||1||

Pause|| Enshrine the Lord's Lotus Feet within your heart; let yourself be lovingly attuned to the One Lord. In the Saadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy, you shall become immaculate and pure; you shall not come to be reincarnated again. ||1|| You are the Support of the soul and the breath of life; You are the Home of the homeless.'

Muslim musicians

Imam Adam Aslam then spoke about the Muslim faith and introduced Ibrahim and Karim, two Muslim musicians from the group Canary Trap, who are infused

Continued overleaf



the guitar) and the daff, an ancient Arab one-sided drum.

19 year old Imam Khuzeimah from the Lingfield Centre sang Urdu gazals.

One of the poems performed read:

‘Oh travellers of this world, your destination is the grave. This journey for which you are preparing will last for only two days. Since the creation of this world thousands and millions have arrived, No one is left.’

David Randolph Horn led a silence and read a Bible passage.

The evening concluded with thanks to every one. Refreshments and food were provided by Gurmukh Singh Deagon in the Sikh tradition of hospitality towards all the guests who had attended a very enjoyable musical evening.

*Gurmukh Singh
Deagon*



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