

World Congress of Faiths News and Views

December 2019



World Congress of Faiths

MEETINGS OF MINDS: CONFLICT, RECONCILIATION AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS



The World Congress of Faiths conference, held on 10 September in Coventry, showcased new insights based on current research and fieldwork in the areas of reconciliation and interfaith work. Based on the premise that both areas can learn from the other, it encompassed six presentations, each offering new ideas for interfaith thinking.

The first speaker, Dr Kristin Aune, Professor of Sociology of Religion at Coventry University, considered chaplaincy on campus, proposing that increased diversity demanded much more than tolerance, protection from discrimination and assurance of equality for all faiths; it required a structural transformation to meet the real challenges of hate crime and low-level, eroding hostility. Students consulted on these issues responded quite simply: 'Bring people together'. Interfaith events at universities were almost always positive, promoting friendship and breaking down barriers. (Continued over)



What is the WCF?

We are a community of individuals from different religious and ethical traditions, committed to learning from one another in a spirit of fellowship and trust. We work to increase spiritual understanding through co-operation and dialogue for the needs of society as a whole.

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Merry Christmas and a
peaceful New Year
from the WCF



Meetings of Minds: Conflict, Reconciliation and Interfaith Relations: Continued

This theme was picked up by Dr Justine Huxley, CEO of St Ethelburga's Centre, who explored how younger people live their faiths in a different way to those of older generations. They are guided by an impulse to act rather than observe; by hope and joy in their relationships with other faiths; and by a more fluid identity that may cross traditional boundaries of ethnicity and nationality. This favours reconciliation, which unlike mediation is not a binary process but must respond to holistic situations, including intergenerational, interfaith and interethnic living.

Jennifer Verson, a doctoral researcher at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University, focussed on new learning about the impact of interreligious ceremonies in protecting faith adherents from violence targeted at religion and belief communities. Her aim is to bring this learning into the public realm to improve safety and security.

Revd. Dr Celia Grace Kenny took forward this contemplation of performance and arts as a gateway to spirituality with her presentation 'Poets, Artists and Prophets in Conversation'. Honorary Lecturer at Queen's University Belfast, Celia explored the question, 'What do poets, artists and prophets have in common?' She proposed that they are all 'outsiders' in that they choose to inhabit the liminal spaces of their tradition and may be criticised by 'insiders' for disloyalty and compromising their identity. Yet by so doing, they open the way for compassion, evoked by a greater understanding of interdependence within humanity.



Dr Jayme Reaves, from the Centre for Encountering the Bible, Sarum College (pictured left) addressed the nature and potential of hospitality as a model for the interfaith encounter. All the major faith traditions have a theology of hospitality, and its provision can be an expression of their faith. Hospitality can have many meanings and implications. Jayme explored two particular instances: the Jewish community of Sarajevo during the Bosnian conflict of the 1990s, and Baljvine village in Croatia where Muslims and

Christians have found ways to ensure that they live 'as one family', providing rich learning for developing lasting interfaith relationships, in particular the need to be watchful and to value what has been achieved.

The final presenter was Dr Shanon Shah, Lecturer in Religion and Social Science at Kings' College London, who also shared important interfaith learning, in this case from his research into LGBTQ relationships in Christianity and Islam. This is an area in which assumptions often dominate, and therefore where even well-intentioned discussion can be at cross-purposes.

Meetings of Minds: Conflict, Reconciliation and Interfaith Relations: Continued

The conference concluded with a moving story of community solidarity in the face of tragedy, shared with delegates by Revd Mark Umpleby, Priest in the United Benefice of Batley.



Mark was in this role when Jo Cox, MP for Batley and Spens, was murdered by a right-wing zealot in June 2016. He recounted a story of collective grief and the coming together of a community, leading in the longer run to positive outcomes such as The Great Get Together, which has become a national project. Rt Hon John Battle, a former MP and Chair of the RC Diocese of Leeds Justice and Peace Commission, joined Mark for a discussion on this particular story and its wider implications for reconciliation and cooperation.

A full report of the conference, and transcripts of four of the presentations, appear in the December 2019 issue of Interreligious Insight.



Younghusband Lecture 2019: Faith and the 'glocal': what globalisation might mean to us



This year, the WCF's annual Younghusband Lecture was given by Dr Anneweike Vroom, Lecturer in Comparative Religion and Philosophy at Utrecht University, Netherlands on the subject of 'Where religion and globalisation meet: issues of change, belonging and aspiration', to a diverse audience drawn from interfaith practice, academe and those with an interest in religious issues.

Dr Vroom introduced the evidence for a world 'massively on the move', in terms of technology, travel and communication. The six busiest flight routes are all in Asia, while internet undersea cables cluster on Europe, North America and the Far East. Does this mean that we now have a global village of 7.7 billion people, or is it the case that we still remain a disparate world?

Addressing the question demands fresh ways of dividing the evolving world into areas, which are no longer regional but recognise new landscapes, and Dr Vroom introduced us to the work of Appadurai (1990), who proposed studying globalisation in the context of the technoscape, mediascape, ethnoscape, financescape and ideoscape. This allows for a comprehension of the way that even a simple piece of technology such as a PC, the design and build of which can cross many traditional national boundaries, with its design originating in one, its marketing in another, and its components coming from any continents.

This approach does not indicate that the world is morphing into a single entity, let alone a better one – for instance, the movement of labour has catastrophic consequences. While there are amplifying trends (which Dr Vroom called 'glocal') there are counter-trends towards fragmentation.

Insofar as religion is concerned, its movement around the world is affected mainly by three factors: missionary (transnational); migration (diaspora); and pluralism. At present, the two largest religions are Christianity (31% of the global population) and Islam (24%), though it must be borne in mind that both have in part grown and evolved by absorbing local traditions.

Dr Vroom gave the audience two examples of the 'glocal' in faith-based activity in two very different settings to illustrate her critical points that religious practice and relationships adapt to their context.

Does this mean that there will eventually be a single, all-encompassing faith? Not any time soon, said Dr Vroom. There may be a movement and sometimes a blending of traditions, but faiths are still interpreted by distinctive religious practices, even though they may have shared values at their core.

First Women:

Jacquetta Gomes: the Female Buddhist Fire Chaplain

A BUDDHIST teacher from Kendal says she is "honoured and delighted" to take her place alongside pioneers such fellow Kendal heroine Elizabeth Fry, a prison reformer on a list of "First Women".

Jacquetta Gomes is the world's first ever female Buddhist Fire Chaplain and her milestone achievement has been recorded by academic Carrie de Silva in her inventory of eminent women. The listings include such luminaries as Nobel Prize winning scientist Marie Curie, fashion designer Coco Chanel, first woman in space Valentina Tereshkova, Florence Nightingale and even two female pigeons who earned medals for wartime gallantry.

Jacquetta made history for her faith upon becoming a fire chaplain for Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, complete with full uniform and steel toe-capped boots, and also serving as a temporary chaplain with East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service. Fire chaplains may be called upon at any time to attend emergencies or to help care for firefighters and staff by listening to them in confidence.

Ms de Silva, who compiled First Women, is a principal lecturer at Harper Adams University in Newport, Shropshire. She described her list as "necessarily incomplete, and somewhat random", covering milestones by women in law, government, the professions, art and culture.

Jacquetta Gomes is a member of The Quaker Tapestry project and sewed part of The Manchester panel of the tapestry (pictured left).

Jacquetta, whose husband Titus is also a Buddhist teacher, said: "Naturally I am honoured and delighted to be included in such a list, alongside wonderful inspirational women . The publication includes women I was taught to respect as a child. All the women on the list have fulfilled important pioneering roles."

Photograph of Jacquetta Gomes with the Elizabeth Fry panel of The Quaker Tapestry.

The photograph is used with permission from the General Manager of The Quaker Tapestry.

In 1813, Elizabeth Fry was asked to take action to help "poor suffering children" imprisoned with their mothers at Newgate Prison. She gathered a group of Quaker women together and they took baby clothes into the prison. She saw for herself the appalling conditions and despair, and thus began her life's work.



First Women Exhibition

The story behind First Women was recently developed into an exhibition of 100 unique portraits capturing women in the UK who were "first" in their field of achievement. The portraits provide inspiration and insight for a new generation of women seeking an understanding of their own roles in a rapidly changing world in which equality is still an issue. The full collection was revealed in 2018 to mark 100 years of women's suffrage. Jacquetta Gomes was photographed and included in the second collection of Another 100 First Women from the UK. The exhibition is currently on tour with 2020 dates covering Brighton, Exeter and St Andrew's University with more dates being added: <https://1stwomenuk.co.uk/>

WCF Journal celebrates 70 years

It is 70 years since the journal of the World Congress of Faiths was launched – 13 years after the founding of the organisation in 1936. The following potted account by Marcus Braybrooke, president of WCF, is a shortened version of what can be read in the forthcoming *Interreligious Insight*.

WCF's journal has had many reincarnations. The first copy – named **Forum** – was published in 1949. Sir John Stewart Wallace, then Honorary Secretary, persuaded Heather McConnell, a young member who had just returned from the Far East, to launch a journal for the WCF. 'My briefing', she recalled, 'was not to be academic and above the heads of our readers but neither was it to play to the lowest common denominator. It should strive to be of general interest to our members in many parts of the world. "Always remember," said Baron Palmstierna, "that we are a movement and not a study group".'

In 1961, the journal was renamed *World Faiths*. Heather continued as editor. She recalled some of the distinguished contributors who had submitted material – Sir John Grubb, Professor Geoffrey Parrinder, Professor Norman Bentwich, Christmas Humphreys, Marco Pallis, to name only a few. She also remembered WCF conferences in Paris and Holland, the opening of Younghusband House, the Dalai Lama's visit.

In 1976, I succeeded Heather McConnell as editor. Heather gave me good advice: 'The editor is simply the conductor of an orchestra and it is due to the many "players" involved that the concert has continued unbroken'. In 1980, the name changed to **World Faiths Insight**. This was because the journal married the New York based Temple of Understanding's journal *Insight*, which had been produced from 1976 by the Temple of Understanding. Professor Seshagiri Rao, of the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, and I became co-editors.

In 1992, now with the Revd. Alan Race as editor, the journal was renamed *World Faiths Encounter*. This indicated that the intention was to focus 'more sharply on both the interactions between religious traditions and on the relationships between people of different religious communities.' Ten years later the journal, after another metamorphosis, became **Interreligious Insight**. This, once again, was a joint Anglo-American enterprise, with Jim Kenney (at that time the International Director of the Parliament of the World's Religions) as a new co-editor, in partnership with Alan Race and Seshagiri Rao. The appearance became more artistic and attractive. There were more poems, prayers, photographs and art illustrations. Cetta Kenney was also involved, working mainly on the photographic and illustrative content. The Editors explained the name in their subtitle, '**A Journal of Dialogue and Engagement**'.

The journal has helped many readers to recognise new truths in their own tradition and to listen and learn from the truths that others hold sacred. May the journal long continue to help readers recognise 'the other' as a blessing and not a threat.

The journal is now available also online and there is an almost complete set of journals with the WCF archives at Southampton University Library.

2019 Student Essays to be published



At the WCF Younghusband lecture in November, attendees heard there were two excellent essay entries this year in response to the question *Is Interfaith Worship a desirable practice?* One essay was from Revd. Jenny Miller (pictured) and one by Aamir Kaderbhainof Mansfield College, University of Oxford. Both winners will be published in *Interreligious Insight* in 2020.

Jenny was able to attend (left) and received a cheque for her nominated charity *Spirit for Peace*. Jenny recently gave a talk at St Mary's Anglican Church on Interfaith, based on her winning essay.

Jenny is an ordained Interfaith Minister as well as a Worship Service Leader of the Unitarian and Free Christian Church. Jenny's background is in both Law as a former Solicitor and as a Transpersonal Psychotherapist and Integrative Child Psychotherapist. She has three daughters, aged 9 and 7 year old twins which keep her busy as a Mum! Jenny is currently studying for her second Masters Degree at Sarum Theological College, with a specific interest in mystical theologies.



WCF visit to the London Baha'i Centre Tuesday 11th February 2020 from 5pm

Refreshments, tour and talk. All welcome but limited numbers so register now.

Join us as we visit the UK National Baha'i Centre and find out more about the faith. The building was constructed in 1853 as a town house for moneyed citizens who at that time sought to move out of the city. Before it was purchased by the National Spiritual Assembly it had been used as an orphanage for the children of actors.

To register to attend please email jenny@worldfaiths.org

EVENTS

Thursday 6th December 7:30pm-9:30pm **Cultural Show and Festive Interfaith Meal**

Milton Keynes Quaker Centre, 1 Oakley Gardens, Downhead Park, MK15 9BH
Interfaith Milton Keynes is holding an event that will include Classical Indian Dance, performances from the intercultural band Crossroots and Natasha Silver. A bring-and-share buffet will be served throughout the evening. Donations in kind are welcome.

For more information: Those attending are asked to inform Christa (by phone 01908 366280 or by email with what food you intend to bring to interfaithmk@gmail.com

Wednesday 11th December 6:45pm-8pm **A talk on 'Modern Qur'anic Exegesis' by Dr Nadine Duvall.** Email Dr Duvall to advise your attendance: nadia.duvall7@gmail.com

Thursday 12th December 7:30pm **Winter Party - Sheffield Interfaith** Shirley House, 31 Psalter Lane, Sheffield, S11 8YL Sheffield Interfaith have are running an event to share some of the winter festivals celebrated by different faiths, with party food and drinks and traditional games from different cultures. **For more information:** email office@standrewspsalterlane.org.uk or call 0114 2678289.

Saturday 11th January 10:30am-12:30pm **Climate emergency - what can we do? - Woking Faith Debates** Christ Church, Jubilee Square, Woking, GU21 6YG Woking Action for Peace, Friends of the Earth, Surrey Faith Links, Woking Quakers and Woking People of Faith are holding the next Woking Debate. **For more information:** contact Keith Scott by email keithsc_2000@yahoo.com or 01483 824980

Wednesday 15th January 2020 4pm-5pm **The challenges and hopes for the Church in Vietnam**

Hinsley Room, Morpeth Terrace SW1P 1EP
Westminster Cathedral Interfaith Group will be hosting Sister Emmanuel Bac Nguyen who will be speaking on "The challenges and hopes for the Church in Vietnam."

For more information: contact John Woodhouse on 0790 8888 586 (by text) or email woodhousesopten@btinternet.com.

Monday 17th February 12:00pm **Faith, Ethics and Organ Donation** **Woolf Institute, Madingley Road, Cambridge CB3 0UB**

This one-day conference will bring together medical professionals and representatives of various faiths in order to discuss the ethical challenges arising from the practice of organ donation and transplantation.

For more information, please contact Dr Farrah Raza farrah.raza@pmb.ox.ac.uk

Wednesday 4th March 2:00pm **Faith and Disability** **Woolf Institute, Madingley Road, Cambridge CB3 0UB**

A collaboration between the Woolf Institute and CRASSH, this seminar focusses on Faith and Disability. With Irfan Yusuf and Peter McMurray.

2nd April 2020 7pm-9pm **Unbelievers: An Emotional History of Doubt** Theos, 77 Great Peter Street, London SW1P 2EZ Drawing on his new book, Unbelievers: An Emotional History of Doubt, Alec Ryrie looks at how the West came to lose its faith. Rather than an attempt to debunk atheism, or to explain its rise 'scientifically', he argues that we can't understand belief, unbelief or the 'secular' world around us without understand that the role of the hearts as well as the head. **For more information:** shorturl.at/qwEX5

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