



## Newsletter of York Interfaith Group

January 2020



In December we held our AGM and a social evening to end our 30<sup>th</sup> year. Now, as we say goodbye to 2019 we start to think about the New Year ahead of us in 2020.

We start this newsletter with sending out our thanks to everyone who took part in the Interfaith Week in York. We say a huge thank you to all those involved in planning the week and to the people who organised an event as part of our week long programme. Thanks also go out to those who attended one or more of the events. It was so good to see some new faces amongst those attending the events and we hope to see you again at our regular monthly session of the York Interfaith Group.

We were really pleased to see some of our 'founder members' at events and special thanks go out to them for their insight 30 years ago in establishing York Interfaith Group. There are some words from Mary Hayward and Peter Doble included in this newsletter that they delivered when the group celebrated their 25 year milestone, 5 years ago and that I thought members may be interested in reading.

Thanks also go to Harriet Crabtree, the Director of National Interfaith Network (IFN) for travelling to join us for our 30<sup>th</sup> celebration event. She praised the work that we do in York and also pointed out a few things for us to improve in future if we can. One of those was our communication and publicity. We are so aware of this and so once again I appeal to anyone out there who could help with doing the newsletter for us please do come forward. Give it a try for a month or two and see how you feel. No pressure to continue if you can't manage it but we would be so grateful for you even to give it a go.

We really do need your help and support so please do think about it for 2020. Thanks to the new people who came forward at the AGM and we look forward to working with you in the year ahead.



## Faith celebrations or festivals this month



### **1 January (Wednesday) NEW YEAR'S DAY/HOGMANAY National**

A day widely observed, as is New Year's Eve the preceding night, throughout the UK, and more especially in Scotland, where bagpipes, haggis and first footing are widespread.



### **1 January (Wednesday) THE CIRCUMCISION OR NAMING OF JESUS Christian**

Celebrates the circumcision and naming of Jesus in accordance with Jewish custom.



### **1 January (Wednesday) to 3 January (Friday) GANJITSU Japanese**

Three day New Year's celebrations during which businesses are closed, families spend time together, decorations are put up and first visits are made to Shinto shrines.



### **2 January (Thursday) BIRTHDAY OF GURU GOBIND SINGH (1666 CE) (Bakrami Lunar Calendar) Sikh**

### **13 January (Monday) BIRTHDAY OF GURU GOBIND SINGH (1666 CE) (Nanakshahi Calendar) Sikh**

Birth Anniversary of the tenth Guru, who instituted the practice of the Five Ks and established the Order of the *Khalsa* on Vaisakhi (Baisakhi). An *akhand path*, an unbroken reading of the whole of the Guru Granth Sahib, spreads over 48 hours.



### **5 January (Sunday) or 12 January (Sunday) ANNUAL METHODIST COVENANT SERVICE Christian**

On the first (or sometimes the second) Sunday of the new year Methodists celebrate an annual Covenant Service in which they pledge themselves to the service of God using a specific form of words.



### **6 January (Monday) THEOPHANY / BAPTISM OF CHRIST Christian (Orthodox)**

Orthodox Christians commemorate the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. 'Theophany' means 'Manifestation of God'. Jesus' miracle at Cana in Galilee is also remembered



### **6 January (Monday) EPIPHANY Christian (Anglican and Roman Catholic)**

Celebrates the visit of the magi/wise men to the infant Jesus, bearing symbolic gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. This is the twelfth day of Christmas.



### **6/7 January (Monday/Tuesday) CHRISTMAS EVE AND DAY Christian (Rastafarian)**

(Eastern Orthodox: Julian calendar); Rastafarian. Many Orthodox churches celebrate Christmas (and other fixed festivals) thirteen days after the Western churches.



### **6/7 January (Monday/Tuesday) ETHIOPIAN CHRISTMAS DAY Christian**

To Rastafarians this is a time not only to celebrate the birth of Jesus in the manner prescribed by tradition, but also to reflect on this event in the context of the original prophecy of his birth, seen as a manifestation of God not only as Priest but as King



**12 January (Sunday) BIRTHDAY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA Hindu**

Vivekananda, an Indian Hindu monk and a disciple of Ramakrishna, was a key figure in introducing the Indian philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga to the Western world.



**12 January (Sunday) BAPTISM OF CHRIST Christian (Anglican)**

Anglican Christians commemorate the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist,



**12 January (Sunday) BAPTISM OF CHRIST Christian (Roman Catholic)**

Christians commemorate the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist; they recall how at this event the heavens were opened and a voice was heard proclaiming Jesus, while God's spirit descended on him in the form of a dove



**13/14 January (Monday/Tuesday) MAKAR SANKRANTI/LOHRI/PONGAL Hindu**

This is a day for almsgiving and patching up quarrels. It is celebrated with rice sugar, pancakes, halva or cornmeal *chapattis*, eaten around a fire



**16 January (Thursday) SHINRAN MEMORIAL DAY Buddhist**

Shinran was the founder of Jodo Shin-shu, one of the schools of Pure Land Buddhism.



**18-25 January (Saturday to Saturday) WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY Christian**

United services are held, and dialogue on unity is encouraged; some worshippers visit other people's churches or invite preachers from different denominations to theirs.



**19 January (Sunday) WORLD RELIGION DAY Baha'i and other groups**

This day promotes interfaith understanding by emphasizing factors common to all faiths. It was first introduced among Baha'i communities in the 1950s, and is now celebrated by a wider spread of communities, including the Baha'i, usually on the third Sunday of January.



**25 January (Saturday) NEW YEAR FESTIVAL/CHUNJIE/YUAN TAN Chinese**

Celebrations last for three or more days, and involve fireworks, dances (e.g. the famous Lion Dance) and gifts of paper money, flowers and sweets. Business accounts are settled and all debts paid before the New Year begins.  
2019 is the year of the Rat.



**25 January (Saturday) HONEN MEMORIAL DAY Buddhist**

Honen (1133-1212 CE) is one of the outstanding figures in the history of Japanese Buddhism, and was the founder of Jodo Shinshu, one of the schools of Pure Land Buddhism.



**25 January (Saturday) to 27 January (Monday) LOSAR Buddhist**

Tibetan New Year festival, but it is often celebrated in Nepal as well. Although largely a secular celebration, it also includes the rededication of the country to Buddhism. It especially celebrates the miracles performed by the historical Buddha at Sravasti, the capital city of the kingdom of Kosala.



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**27 January (Monday) HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY National**

A day for remembrance of people who suffered, chiefly at the hands of the Nazis during the second World War but also in other persecutions. It aims to keep memory fresh and ensure that no such atrocity happens again.

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**29 January (Wednesday) to 30 January (Thursday) SARASVATI PUJA/VASANT PANCHAMI Hindu**

Widely celebrated in North India, this festival marks the beginning of spring. For Hindus it is usually linked with Saraswati, the goddess of learning and the arts. Yellow is her associated colour.

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**30 January (Thursday) JASHN-E SADEH Zoroastrian [Iranian]**

A mid winter bonfire festival to signify that days are getting longer. The litany to fire, the *Atash Niyayesh*, is recited, and Iranian legends are told of King Hoshang (who discovered the art of making fire). Piping hot stew, dancing & merry making feature.

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**Please remember to let us know about any special festivals being celebrated by your faith group so that we can include them in our newsletters.**

**News & Information from York Interfaith Group**

**AGM** – At our AGM in December we gave thanks to Daryoush Mazloun who had been our Chairperson for the last two years and presented him with a small token of our gratitude for all the work he has done. Thanks were also given to Anthony Glaister who had been our Treasurer and Sister Patricia who had been our Secretary. The following people were elected to be on the YIG committee for 2020:- Anne Castle, Mahendra Verma, Patricia Harris, Keith Bishop – Treasurer, Dee Boyle – Vice-Chair, Avtar Matharu – Chair, Daryoush Mazloun and Penny Siddall – Secretary. A few other people came forward to offer their support and these will be discussed at the first committee meeting in January. We are still waiting for Muslim representative to be confirmed.

**Next YIG Meeting - On January 7<sup>th</sup> 2020** we will be having the first monthly session of the New Year. The title is '**Why don't we all have the same New Year**'. A panel from our own members will explore what happens for each of them and why. This meeting will be in our new home of **the SNOW ROOM** at City of York Council, West Offices, Station Rise, York YO1 6GA. The room is available to us from just after 7pm and the session will start at 7.30pm.

There will be a meeting of the new committee before the monthly session and this will take place at 6.15 in one of the smaller meeting rooms at West Offices.

## Extracts from a talk to the Interfaith Group 5 years ago.

### **Interfaith roots and journeys: Local and Personal perspectives Peter Doble and Mary Hayward**

*In May we were invited to speak to the Interfaith group and explain something of its origins and roots in what was then The York Religious Education Centre at the College of Ripon & York St John - the Interfaith group took shape prior to the College becoming a University. Thinking about 'roots' in preparation for this prompted each of us to reflect on some of our own interfaith encounters and journeys which had led to our commitment to promoting an open approach to faiths and beliefs at the Centre. Since neither of us had a script for the meeting, we write now largely in a report format for readers who were not able to be present in May.*

#### **Journeys, roots and encounters**

*Peter.* Shortly after India's exultation in its Independence and its trauma of partition (both in 1947), Peter lived for some years in Tamil Nadu; he recalled three encounters at that time which had contributed to shaping his approach to others' faiths. He spoke first of conversations with a Muslim watchmaker, still tensely nervous in a predominantly Hindu setting. They were two "aliens" in an India that welcomed them. Those personal conversations allowed a Christian to learn from a Muslim what it meant *to be muslim*. Later, weekly conversation with a Brahmin priest whose formal task was to polish Peter's Tamil, found "strangers" sharing in dialogue over Tamil literary texts, an ancient and celebrated tradition; dialogue led to opening up the Bhagavad Gita, and discovering how a Hindu interpreted this text. Finally, he was indebted to many conversations with people among the marginalised of Tamil society, where a listener learned from an underclass whose dreams and hopes and daily struggles were those of humans often ignored, sometimes despised by their fellows. From such encounters, Peter learned to reconceptualise the word "neighbour" in his own tradition, to listen more carefully to others, and to begin to understand the diversities and complexities of faiths. Consequently, York in the Eighties was to prove a deep cultural shock for him.

*Mary* recalled some of her earliest childhood recollections of those of other faiths.... a Sikh door to door salesman when she was a very small child; her father's Jewish business partner. Each of these was clearly only a subliminal influence, but in the Jewish case offered at least an oblique awareness of a different calendar and significant times - Sabbath, Pesach. School had added little to these experiences, and worse, although Mary had studied in a University Theology faculty which had a specialist professor in 'comparative' religion, and in Indian philosophy and Buddhism in particular, such areas of study were deemed inappropriate for undergraduates! Work in London after University included teaching in a large comprehensive school comprising staff and children from many different backgrounds - Turkish Cypriot, Greek, North and South Indian, Malaysian, Caribbean - although the school gave little if any recognition to this rich cultural mix. Within ILEA (the Inner London Education Authority) however there was a growing interest in multicultural education, and an increasing awareness and developing conscience regarding Britain's colonial history.... although RE was at first little affected by these trends.

But the seminal experience for Mary, as well as opportunities to meet with members and study different faith traditions had come with a move to Lancaster University to work in the new Department of Religious Studies, headed by Prof Ninian Smart. Unlike many other new universities at this time, Lancaster had established a place for the study of religion; its new department was open to those of any faith or none and its courses and staff reflected this. Among its courses were RAT, a course in Religious and Atheistic thought, Buddhist studies which attracted Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka and Thailand, Islam (taught initially by a Scottish Muslim) and opportunities to study Hindu tradition; it was also recognised that understanding religions calls on other disciplines and so for example sociology of religion was a part of programmes there from the start. The department was also home to a major national project on Religious Education in the Secondary School (Mary was a member of its team). Recommended reading for those interviewed for research posts on this project included Ninian Smart's Heslington Lectures, delivered in the University of York in 1966 and subsequently published under the title *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion*.

Among the many insights of this book, which had long reaching effects as far as RE was concerned, was Smart's identification of what he termed the *dimensions* of religion. These dimensions offered a ground plan, a map of a religion, which encouraged looking at religions holistically and in a balanced way, whilst also recognising their inner complexity. This notion of dimensions was taken up again by Smart almost 30 years later in his *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs*; here his initial six dimensions gained a seventh and the dimensions were named as follows:

- The ritual or practical dimension
- The doctrinal or philosophical dimension
- The mythic or narrative dimension
- The experiential or emotional dimension
- The ethical or legal dimension
- The organisational or social component
- The material or artistic dimension

Of course these dimensions are to be found with variations in balance and expression in different religions and indeed within different traditions within any religion; that balance will vary historically too - religions change. The interrelation of these dimensions also needs to be kept in mind; for example, practical community service may be motivated by belief, determined by ethical ideals, made possible by the social structure of the faith etc. What Smart has done is to offer a 'functional description' of religion rather than a definition. He helps his readers to 'see' a faith - and, importantly, not to be blind to its inner motivations and compulsions, hence his important recognition of the experiential dimension. For anyone involved in RE in the early 1970s this kind of thinking offered a radical departure from the biblical studies which had hitherto been the subject's focus. The task and possibility of understanding humankind's rich religious experience was now central.

After these glimpses of key early moments in their journeys, Peter and Mary invited those present to reflect for a few moments on their own encounters..... They then both spoke of their initial experience of York, which in 1980 had on a number of fronts seemingly little interest in the diversity of faiths already apparent in the City,

and certainly evident elsewhere in Yorkshire. In the light of their earlier journeys and a somewhat unpromising scenario in York they set out to develop the work of the recently established York Religious Education Centre. Two fundamental principles coloured their work at the Centre: understanding and engagement.

## Understanding

Peter explained that working in the field of RE in the early 1980s meant working within many layers of ferment about multi-faith, multi-cultural issues; that ferment was largely an on-going debate about RE's stance, about its purpose – was it, for example, to nurture into faith? to tolerate otherness? – and about its content -- does it, in “Christian” Britain include “other” faiths...? More generally, Britain was grappling with wider multi-faith, multi-cultural issues: the Swann Report caused more than ripples. This ferment was further complicated by widespread misunderstanding of the word “religion,” a weasel word concealing many issues. That misunderstanding was endemic among teacher groups, church groups, in the media and throughout the processes of legislation. In this ferment the Centre's stance was clear: its commitment was to fostering *understanding* of what it was to be human within the world's faith traditions. “Understanding” is a word that summarises a complex concept. Many of the Centre's courses entailed an exercise in conceptual analysis for people who might well have never before met such concern for discernment in using language. Briefly, by this kind of reflection, Mary and Peter sought to bring about in their contacts *a willingness and a growing ability to:*

- learn about another's world-view;
- listen to another;
- empathise with another, then
- reflect critically (that is, with reasoned judgment) on another's worldview.

This process carefully distinguished *understanding* from *commitment* to a worldview. But such understanding was brought about by guided reflection on engagement with people living within their faith traditions.

## Engagement

Mary gave some examples of this. 'Engagement' here can mean a number of things; developing York RE Centre as a *national* centre (in the 1980s and 1990s there were 5 centres largely seen in this way) meant engaging with key developments in RE and with those engaged in determining its nature and future. For the Centre this meant an on-going relationship with the National Society - one of its sponsors - and the Church of England, but also a wide range of other bodies and organisations. At a regional level, for example, the Centre contributed to the work of SACREs in many ways eg in the preparation and implementation of Agreed Syllabuses. Sometimes engagement went beyond the UK – for example, a major conference organised for EFTRE (European Forum of Teachers of RE) on the environment brought together in York teachers and lecturers from across Europe, and enabled perspectives from six religions to be presented and discussed. Another strand of engagement was with resources which we frequently reviewed for different organisations, but also made available through the Centre, and of course used in the wide range of teaching we undertaken much of it across the region.

Teaching and courses figured largely in the work done by the centre, and *this was the main focus of the kind engagement* Mary wished to highlight. An underpinning

approach exemplified in the York SHAP Conferences - 9 in all - a fruitful relationship between the Centre and SHAP, and designed to enable teachers to encounter major faiths. These conferences had a number of ingredients: they offered an introduction to academic study of a particular faith, included opportunities to hear and/ or meet with members of the faith and an experiential aspect - for example, Sikhs from Leeds installed the Guru Granth Sahib during one conference and sang *kirtan*; at another, Buddhist monks lived long side conference members, who helped with food preparation and distributing this to the monks, following the pattern of their day and also attending early morning meditation. Of course such involvement was optional for members, but proved memorable, engaging and fostering deeper understanding of others' traditions - and often self-understanding too. Transcending the informative was in action here. Another phrase which used to highlight engagement was cultivating 'a listening eye'. 'Seeing' may be more than just 'looking', letting the immediate take you beyond itself to questions and understanding. Developing a listening eye is a useful concept when you examine artefacts or buildings; it was a skill teachers and students developed on visits and in researching and using the collections of artefacts from different faiths made available through the Centre. Such resources were also found to be helpful in enabling adults with learning difficulties to articulate their own experiences and memories, as well as 'connect' them to others' ways of life. Simulations – which can often be a subject of debate with regard to their appropriateness of course - were also part of the engagement strategies used - with care - thus for example offering a celebration of *Pesach*, keeping *Shabbat* at a weekend conference, became part of learning to understand Jewish tradition and a living encounter with a Jewish way of life.

#### **A postscript.....**

*We were asked to explain how York interfaith group came to be! We have tried to give you a glimpse - and it is only a glimpse - of where we came from and of two principles which came to underpin our work at the Centre in the 1980s; the Centre's work and approach became widely known and - as we recall- we were approached by members of the Baha'I community and asked whether the Centre could help with the formation of a York Interfaith group. We were happy to do this, and although institutional constraints precluded financial support, we were very happy to provide a place for the group's early meetings and to mount occasional lectures and events which were of interest to the Interfaith Group as well as a wider public. It is good to know that some 25 years later (now 30 years) York Interfaith Group continues to prosper. Understanding among faiths remains vital to human flourishing. We conclude by sharing with you a quotation to which we have often returned:*

**No peace among the nations - without peace among the religions.  
No peace among the religions - without dialogue between the religions  
No dialogue between the religions - without investigation of the foundation of the religions.**

Hans Küng

*I love this quotation and it is one that continues to be relevant today – Editor's note*

**The Website** Many thanks to Jan Jauncey and her son for continuing to look after the York Interfaith Group website. Please see the website for an introduction to the group's activities and for on-going events and updates... [www.yorkinterfaith.org](http://www.yorkinterfaith.org)



**IFN - The National Body** As members of the National Inter Faith Network (IFN) for the UK, York Interfaith Group sets out to bring its aims to the local level. For more information please see [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk) Plus, readers may wish to remain abreast of events and developments on the national level. To do so, for a link to the latest e-bulletin please see: <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/ifn-e-bulletin>

**Subscriptions** The group welcomes new members and Anthony Glaister, York Interfaith Group Treasurer, welcomes any subscriptions from local groups and individuals (ranging from £20 or £10 for groups to £15 individual standard fee and £6 for concessions, free for full time students)

**Contact us:** To contact the York Interfaith Group committee please email us on: [yorkinterfaithgroup@gmail.com](mailto:yorkinterfaithgroup@gmail.com)

**Any items for the next newsletter please send them by 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan. for the February issue.**

**Guest editor this month – Dee Boyle (Unitarian, Buddhist, Pagan)**

Please do consider being guest editor for the newsletter. Without your support we may not be able to continue to have newsletters each month so please do think about helping out.



**May the New Year bring everyone much happiness and good health. May it also bring you enough wealth for you to be comfortable and to allow you to share some of it with others less fortunate than yourselves.**