

IFW NEWS

Interfaith Wolverhampton



Chaman Sandhu, Councillor Beverley Momenabadi, and Squadron Leader Amir Khan, at the “Faith within the Armed Forces” event on Tuesday June 26th.

Interfaith Wolverhampton aims to work with the diverse communities living in and around Wolverhampton in order to foster and nurture mutual understanding and appreciation between the different faiths. It seeks to arrange, encourage and support dialogue between those of different faiths and no faith, communities and agencies so as to contribute to an inclusive environment of mutual respect and harmony.

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Reminder - Members' subscriptions are due from 1st April for 2018-2019 membership. If yours is overdue, please send your renewal as soon as possible.

IFW, 24 School Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 4LF.
Phone: 01902 – 427601
Email: admin@ifwton.org.uk
Website: ifwton.org.uk

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The office is most likely to be staffed between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. - Best to phone before you visit.

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**The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service**

The MBE for volunteer groups

The role of Faith within the Armed Forces

In the era of Brexit rhetoric where the favourite phrase seems to be ‘take back control’ which has left a sour taste in many people’s mouths about immigration, many people have started to question what contribution immigrants make to Britain. Some people suggest nothing at all, others are comforted that immigrants offer their skills in areas such as healthcare and within our NHS but have we paused for a moment to think about the great sacrifice that immigrants make to defend and protect Britain and British people?

I had never really paused to think about that until the evening of Tuesday June 26th where I attended an event which the City of Wolverhampton and Interfaith Wolverhampton hosted about the role of faith in our Armed Forces as we approached Armed Forces Day the following Saturday.

The event provided the community with the opportunity to learn firstly about the wide range of faith communities within the Armed Forces; Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Jews, Muslims and more. But, also about the fantastic work that faith communities outside of the Armed Forces are doing to support our men and women in defence.

The facts and figures left me feeling stupidly ignorant; we have over 4000 Buddhists serving in defence, we have chaplains from all the faith

groups listed above providing crucial pastoral support to these men and women serving in our Armed Forces.

Having attended the event, I left feeling confident. Confident in answering the question that (recently) so often comes up, ‘*what do immigrants contribute to our country?*’ Well, pictured on the front cover, on the left of me is Chaman Sandhu who is a Sikh who has served for 5 years in the army. Pictured on my right is Squadron Leader Amir Khan, who is a Muslim who has served in the RAF for 34 years with a tour list longer than my arm which includes Turkey, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo just to name a few. Their contribution to Britain (as second generation immigrants) is this- almost 40 years in service defending our country.

I was also left with a sense of personal responsibility. Bishop Clive of Wolverhampton pointed out that it is easy to blame the media or Politicians for the information that society is filled with about immigration and other topics but we all have a personal responsibility to act in a way which spreads the message of love, unity and the ability to have an open heart and mind.

So, let's celebrate our multi faith armed forces who make incredible sacrifices in the name of our country. Let's share our learning of Squadron Leader Amir Khan or about the 4000 Buddhists

serving in defence. For me, these are some of the things that 'make Britain great'.



Councillor Beverley Momenabadi

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Relevant Websites:



"Help for Heroes believes that those who put their lives on the line for us, deserve a second chance at life. We provide lifetime support for the Armed Forces Community and their families".

<https://www.helpforheroes.org.uk/>

Veterans For Peace UK is a voluntary, open and democratic ex-services organisation of men and women. "All of our members have served in the armed forces, many of us on operations around the world".

<http://vfpuk.org/about/>



<http://www.AtEase.org.uk/>

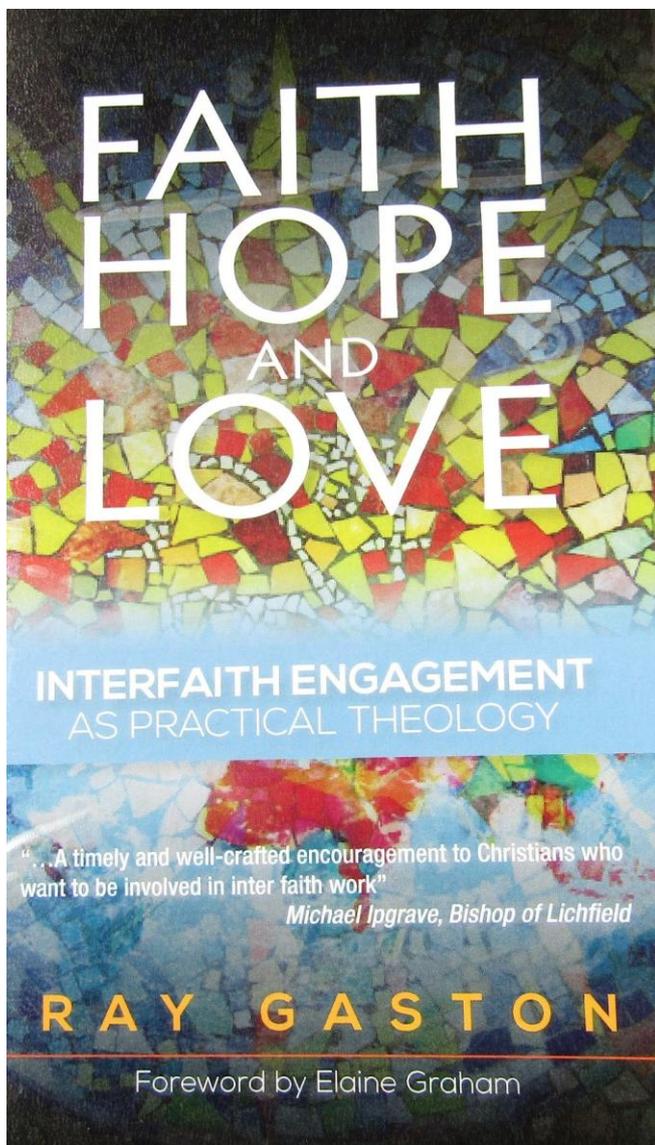
The Royal British Legion provides lifelong support for the Armed Forces community - serving men and women, veterans, and their families. <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/>



“Faith, Hope and Love” by Ray Gaston.
A Book Review by Erik Pearse.

Faith, hope and love, the latest book by Ray Gaston who is now the Vicar of St Chad's in Penn Fields and the Bishop of Wolverhampton's interfaith adviser, is challenging in more senses than one. Addressed to theologically-literate Christians, though well and cogently written, it can be hard going for non-theologians such as me – but the effort to understand the text is well worthwhile, unveiling as it does the practical challenge facing Christians who wish to pursue interfaith engagement today. The sub-title – *Interfaith engagement as practical theology* - accurately reflects Ray's focus on a primarily practical, as opposed to theoretical, approach to

interfaith work. For me, this was well illustrated by last year's interfaith Prayers for Peace service, which Ray took it upon himself to organise. Whereas, traditionally, the involvement of schools had taken the form of specific contributions by each school from their particular faith perspective, Ray's approach was to bring together three schools from different faith traditions (Christian, Muslim and Sikh) and get them to work together in preparing their joint contributions – practical collaboration on a common project, promoting and deepening understanding of 'the other' through joint action and involvement.



a deeper and sanctifying experience in which that very particularity (Christ's total self-giving) is enhanced in the process of risking it.' That certainly expresses, more profoundly than I could have, my own experience.

I think that Ray is being slightly unfair when stating in his introduction that, since the '70's, the interfaith movement has changed and the interfaith organisations established in the '70's have now 'largely run their course'. In Wolverhampton, one of the main energisers of interfaith work from the start was not theological discourse but an active and joint common endeavour to promote social cohesion, be it in response to Enoch Powell's Rivers of Blood speech or behind-the-scenes mediation to persuade a school to withdraw its highly-provocative ban on pupils wearing a turban. Nevertheless, his message, based as it is on a wide-ranging reading of different theological approaches, from St Francis of Assisi to Panikkar via Wesley and many others, is salutary – dialogue without practical engagement will only go so far. There is always the danger of just becoming a talking-shop or of collaborating on issues or projects of superficial importance. Ray's particular experience is in challenging islamophobia – that particular issue does not look likely to disappear any time soon. Plenty of work still for Interfaith Wolverhampton!

Dialogue itself can be a fruitful form of deepening engagement. Drawing on his experience as a tutor at the Queen's College Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education in Birmingham, Ray explains how the sharing of individual interfaith experiences between his Christian students from different traditions can lead to revealing intra-faith dialogue which can in turn enrich our personal understanding of our own beliefs. Furthermore, in the context of interfaith engagement, Ray stresses that, mindful of Christ's very particular demonstration of love through total self-giving, Christians must face the inherent risk of approaching 'the other' in such a spirit of humility and service as to seemingly renounce their Christian roots. Yet this will take them 'into

[One of the treasures of the Ivy Gutridge Collection in the Central Library]



Erik Pearse

Wolverhampton Council Celebrates Eid al-Fitr 2018

On the 18th June, The Mayor - Councillor Phil Page, Deputy Leader - Cllr. Peter Bilson, and dignitaries from Wolverhampton attended the first celebration by Wolverhampton City Council of Eid al-Fitr, the feast to celebrate the completion of the holy month of Ramadan. Cllrs. Sohail (Tettenhall Ward) and Cllr. Obaida (St Peter's) were also present at the event, as well as Parveen Brugie (Chair) and Bhajan Devsi from InterFaith Wolverhampton.



The event was held in the newly refurbished Mayor's parlour, and dignitaries from Wolverhampton Council of Mosques and other faith communities were invited to listen to a recitation of the Holy Quran by Imam Qari Ismail Surati, followed by a translation. Then on behalf of Interfaith Wolverhampton, Vice-Chair Dr. Yusuf Shafi presented the Prophet's last Sermon. An Asian buffet lunch and networking were then enjoyed by guests.

This is the first time that the Council have acknowledged a Muslim celebration within the Civic Centre, and all felt that it was a positive step to recognise the over 22,000 Muslim citizens of Wolverhampton.

Council Equality officer, Shabir Hussain, commented, "This event was important to share the message of good will and peace with all Faiths in Wolverhampton, and to send a message to Wolverhampton's communities that Wolverhampton is a vibrant, multicultural,

prosperous and tolerant city, proud of all its inhabitants and their diversity".



Dr. Yusuf Shafi
Vice Chair – InterFaith Wolverhampton

Oakwood Prison Faith Festival

Faith Fest in Prison – August 17th, 2017

Many members of Inter Faith Wolverhampton came into HMP Oakwood to be part of a day celebrating the diversity of faiths in the jail. In spite of a few hiccups it was an unqualified success with hundreds taking part in the event. There was a wonderful variety of displays and stands with representatives of the faiths prepared to talk about the material to staff and men visiting the stands.

The picture shows just some of the chaplains taking part – Free Church, Rastafarian, Quaker, Buddhist, Sikh, Spiritualist, Methodist. Others, like the Imam, were busy in the room sorting out food!



The programme included: some men being brave enough to give personal testimonies about their faith journey at Oakwood, there was a play written by a Rastafarian in which many men took part, there was a song that everyone joined in and a music group that played between the items.

It was a whole day event, with the production being performed twice, so that as many as possible could attend in either the morning or the afternoon. In all around 230 men attended the Faith Fest.

Jill Parker

Visit My Mosque Day

Wolverhampton Mosques Open Doors to welcome all!

3 mosques in Wolverhampton, Aqsa Mosque Waterloo Rd, Medina Mosque Newhampton Rd and Tayyaba Mosque at Humber Rd opened their doors on 18th February 2018 as part of Visit My Mosque Day with the aim of building more bridges between communities.



Maulana Rashid (Wolverhampton Council of Mosques) said, “Muslims across the City are yet again sending a strong message that despite what the headlines say, we are open, engaging in dialogue and positively contributing to British public life. Last year saw over 500 visitors attend at Aqsa Mosque Visit My Mosque open day event and we had similar numbers this year - even more visitors took the opportunity to get to know their Muslim neighbours.”

Organiser Khalid Akhtar at Medina Mosque and Chair of W-ton Council of Mosques said: “Most mosques have an open door policy and anyone can walk in at any time of their year. Our mosque organises events where people of other faiths (or no faith) are welcome to attend - Visit My Mosque day is just an initiative where mosques have timed their open days to be on the same day. They are successful because mosques across the country came together for a common purpose”.



The three mosques invited people from all backgrounds to pop in for tea and biscuits - and learn more about the Muslim way of life. This was as part of a national event to build better relationships with the community and dispel misconceptions about British Muslims.

On the 2nd June 2018, mosques were again open in Wolverhampton for the city-wide Iftari event, where local people were invited to mosques to join in a meal at the fast-breaking time at sunset.

The mosques had displays and posters of the Five Pillars and allowed visitors to view ablution, prayers and watch various videos on aspects of Islam. There was a focus of ‘Muslims in UK’ at Medina Mosque and other mosques also ensured there were opportunities for question and answer sessions.



It was a family event with the whole family being present and able to speak with both male and female Muslims about their Faith.

Dr. Yusuf Shafi
Vice Chair – InterFaith Wolverhampton

“If in doubt, speak out”

- A report from the Safeguarding Celebration Event, July 16th, 2018



“Taking a journey to implement Safeguarding policies is worth it because it allows people to find their dignity and worth in God in a safe place which is a critical aspect to this work”
- This was the rallying call at a meeting of faith groups to celebrate the recent Safeguarding project.

The meeting was hosted by Interfaith Wolverhampton, Near Neighbours, Wolverhampton Safeguarding and WVSC to celebrate a project to encourage faith organisations to implement Safeguarding policies and practices to safeguard children and vulnerable adults from physical, mental or spiritual abuse.



Forty-five people gathered from some of the 263 faith groups in Wolverhampton. We were reminded of the need to protect children and vulnerable adults by David Perrin (from the New Testament Church of God Harvest Temple in Heath Town), who works professionally as a Safeguarding trainer. He reminded us that faith organisations need to adopt policies to ensure that children and vulnerable adults are protected, groups need to appoint a Safeguarding “lead” to ensure policies are implemented, key people need to have a DBS (“Disclosure and Barring System”) check, and management committees need to take seriously their responsibilities. It felt sad however, that some of the reasons Rev David used to persuade groups of the need to implement policies was to facilitate funding and to satisfy the Charities Commission. While these are important aspects, surely our primary concern as people of faith should primarily be about valuing children and vulnerable adults enough that we want to keep them safe from harm.

Mr Nasir Abbas talked about how Safeguarding training had made a positive change in his mosque. The teaching staff had learnt how to spot the risk signs and how to protect children, and they have developed better and more effective communications which has given a greater sense of safety and wellbeing. The meeting was also

reminded by Ian Darch, the chief-executive of WCVS, that it is not possible to “spot” a perpetrator of abuse so we need to be alert to the risks and not ignore them. “If in doubt, speak out” and contact the relevant authorities. It’s far better to report a concern than to keep quiet thinking someone else will report it – If everyone thinks the same we are keeping someone at risk.

Before a useful conversation with the audience, certificates were presented to the many faith groups who had taken part in training organised by the project.



You can report Safeguarding concerns about children by phoning 01902 555392, and about adults on 01902 551199 (for out-of-hours service for both call 01902 552999).

It’s never too late to get your organisation started. Future training courses are being held on 26th July (6.30 - 9 pm) and 4th August (9 am to 1:30 pm). Contact Pav for more details or any other questions, on 07538 105780 or pmainn@wolverhamptonvsc.org.uk

The Revd Christopher Collins

Diary of Events

August

21st (Tuesday) Bring and Share Lunch 12.45 - 2.00, "Darlington Street Methodist Centre", 24 School Street, WV1 4LF. Speaker: Brenda Shuttleworth will talk about her faith and her work with Fairtrade.



September

18th (Tuesday) Bring and Share Lunch 12.45 - 2.00, "Darlington Street Methodist Centre", 24 School Street, WV1 4LF.

19th (Wednesday) Interfaith Wolverhampton AGM 7:30 p.m.

21st (Friday) Peace One Day "Building peace one day at a time". Peace One Day is a non-profit organisation that was founded in 1999. In 2001, due to their efforts, the member states of the United Nations unanimously adopted the first ever annual day of global ceasefire and non-violence on September 21st – Peace Day.
<http://www.peaceday.org/>

29th (Saturday) Who are the Quakers? 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wolverhampton Quakers invite us to their Open Day to find out about Quaker beliefs and practice. Displays, Discussions and Quaker Worship (optional). Drop in for as long or as briefly as you wish - Refreshments will be available all day. Friends' Meeting House, 8b Summerfield Road, Chapel Ash, Wolverhampton, WV1 4PR. How has their faith led Quakers to be at the forefront of - Slavery Abolition? Prison Reform? Working Against War?

October

14th (Sunday) Sewa Day Sewa is a sanskrit word and is embedded in the Dharmic traditions of ancient India. It means to sacrifice your time and resources for the benefit of others without wanting anything in return.
<http://www.sewaday.org/about-sewa-day/>



14th - 21st Week of Prayer for World Peace Annual inter-faith week focussing on the need for justice, peace and reconciliation. <http://www.weekofprayerforworldpeace.com> .

18th (Tuesday) Bring and Share Lunch 12.45 - 2.00, "Darlington Street Methodist Centre", 24 School Street, WV1 4LF.

21st to 28th One World Week One World Week is a Development Education Charity. An opportunity for people from diverse backgrounds to come together to learn about global justice, to spread that learning, and to use it to take action for justice locally and globally. <https://www.oneworldweek.org> .

27th (Saturday) Public Debate 7 pm at St. Peter's Church, Wolverhampton City Centre. Organised by Erik Pearse, a "controlled and courteous" Public Debate between invited speakers on the issue of whether or not there should be a second "People's Vote" about 'Brexit'. The Revd Rachel Parkinson will chair the event. Further details to follow.

November

Interfaith Wolverhampton Annual Conference - Mental Health Awareness .

11th to 18th National Inter Faith Week <https://www.interfaithweek.org/> .

20th (Tuesday) Bring and Share Lunch 12.45 - 2.00, "Darlington Street Methodist Centre", 24 School Street, WV1 4LF.

For up-to-date details, see the Interfaith Wolverhampton website: <http://ifwton.org.uk/diary.html>