Welcome...

...to this Issue

Our Challenge
The Challenge for the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith and Regeneration Network (WIFRN) as well as the City itself still remains to build Wolverhampton as a more vibrant, relaxed and harmonious City of Diversity, where all Wulfrunians irrespective of their ethnicity, religion and cultural background play a full part in the mainstream life of the City.

It is a difficult and uphill but not an impossible task. What we need is the will and determination with a total commitment to fulfil it.

As a result of the recent merger and the formation of a single inter-faith organisation in the City we are now better able and better placed to undertake this responsibility. We are a stronger and much more effective body playing an even more influential role in the City’s life. The WIFRN is being seen as a body, united, coherent and dedicated to fulfilling a common vision and purpose. The Inter-Faith voice is slowly but surely being heard and taken notice of by the wide-ranging decision-making bodies of the City.

It is vitally important and absolutely essential that we work even harder and more vigorously together to bring the energies of all people of Wolverhampton in our mission of achieving cohesion, mutual respect and eventually labelling our City as a “City of Sanctuary”. It is therefore imperative for all of us to further develop and promote knowledge and understanding about one another’s faith, belief and culture through goodwill, friendship and fellowship. For this purpose we must have the courage and determination as well as strong commitment to “service above self”. In this journey, we must also bear in mind that the best relationship is one in which our love for each other must exceed our need for each other.

In reaching our destination we must gain the active support and cooperation of all faith communities, particularly the younger generation, in the City. Since its inception, the Inter-Faith movement in the City has been ceaselessly fighting injustice and unfairness without glory or recognition. It has also, on a number of occasions, defused quite a few potentially explosive and dangerous situations while at the same time it has been vigorously striving to identify what is common in our respective faiths in spite of the deep theological and cultural differences between them.

This task is increasingly becoming ever more challenging and difficult in view of the global turmoil, which, at times, may have been impacting on our City and jeopardising to some extent our mutual respect and relationships, our trust in, and friendship with, one another.

(Continued on page 2)
Welcome...

We must leave no stone unturned to robustly resist this from happening. We are all well aware that we have faced and overcome even more complex problems in the past and have succeeded in sustaining peace and harmony in our City on each and every occasion. Our motto has always been, no matter what happens elsewhere in the world and how strongly we condemn it, we will not allow anything or anyone to interfere with our solidarity and resolve for peace and harmony and we will do everything we can to preserve them.

Once again the time has come for the WIFRN to be strong and totally united to fight for a consistent and principled policy in all affairs of our City in order that justice and fairness as well as equality of opportunities can prevail, thereby enabling us together to turn Wolverhampton into a healthy, prosperous, sustainable, peaceful, harmonious, vibrant, multi-cultural, cohesive and most desirable City to live in.

This, with a sustained and concerted effort, is undoubtedly well within our reach because all Wulfrunians have a dogged determination with a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love for humanity.

Harun Rashid
Chairman

(Continued from page 1)

“A Minority within a Minority”
A report on converts to Islam in the UK
By M.A. Kevin Bruce,
Swansea University (UK)
On behalf of Faith Matters.
A Review by Tim Fyffe

I commend this Report (40 pp) as informative and clearly written, bringing together various pieces of previous research with some excellent original material. The one-page Executive Summary fully sums up most of what the non-expert will want to find out. Conclusions are not startling or shocking, leaving a general impression of both men and women converting in relatively small numbers, but a steady stream, some indeed for the oft-quoted marital reasons, but the larger number from conviction. There is little deliberately organised “evangelism”, and often little support for the convert from the mosque community. There is little evidence that the majority of converts are converted to “radical” or “violent” Islam, though some are – mainly from the Asian British. Many of the converts, especially from the White British, hope that they can be a bridge to greater understanding between the Muslim and host communities. Press coverage is mainly negative, choosing stories emphasising either the “violence” motif, or some “weird” or amusing reason (normal conversion is dull!)

The Report can be downloaded from the Faith Matters website, or ordered in hard copy from fiyaz@faith-matters.co.uk. Tim is putting one copy in the WIFRN office.

Having commended the Report as worth reading, I have to say that for me the most interesting bit of the project was:

- awakening my awareness of Muslim converts as a factor in our community,
- drawing my attention to “Faith Matters” as an important player and possible partner in the Inter-Faith movement.
 Often we find ourselves with a concept that we do not fully understand or appreciate. This is true of many things and not least when it comes to the historical implications and the future impact upon our City and local communities.

I believe that the proposed ‘City of Sanctuary’ for Wolverhampton falls into this category. So it is good to ask, ‘what’s it all about, how does it impact upon us and what are the historical implications’?

So what is a ‘City of Sanctuary’ all about?

City of Sanctuary is a national movement to build a culture of hospitality for people who are seeking sanctuary from persecution in their own country. The aim is to develop a network of towns and cities throughout the UK that we are proud to call ‘Places of Safety’ where those who are seeking sanctuary can become an integral part of that community, thus giving them the chance to start again free from persecution, with the help and support of their adopted host town or city. At present there are 15 such towns and cities recognised as Cities of Sanctuary in the UK already.

Many of us will never be able to fully understand or comprehend the gravity of the situation for those who have become victims of insidious attacks upon their simple basic human rights. We are so accustomed to our freedom that we take it for granted. Sadly for many people in other countries this is not so.

In the past we have not been very good at providing a welcome to newcomers. Often newcomers are people who simply want to make a better life for themselves and their families.

They came, took the poorest paid jobs, and lived in small communities that experienced tremendous hostility towards them. Let’s be clear about this, I do not believe it was their fault neither do I believe it was directly the fault of the communities that they settled into. If we are to apportion blame it should go to those who allowed economics to be the only motivator that created the situation wherein two cultures were quite independently put side by side without any provision whatsoever. No wonder we had problems. Any society that fails to recognise and learn from past mistakes is doomed to keep repeating them with all the suffering and human misery that goes with it.

City of Sanctuary gives the opportunity to learn from our past mistakes and to create a provision wherein this cycle of events can be halted.

The Bishop of Wolverhampton endorsed a circular letter that promoted the concept and informed everyone that there would be a public meeting at The Workspace on Monday 9th May 2011. Out of the 50 or so people that attended only a very small portion were organisers. The mood of the meeting was positive.

The main speaker was Rev Inderjit Bhogal OBE who came to the UK in 1964. He lived and worked in Dudley, West Midlands where he established one of the first Inter-faith groups in the UK. For a number of years, he was the co-ordinator of the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group until moving to Sheffield in 1987. Inderjit is a Methodist Minister, a theologian and former President of the British Methodist Conference. He is dedicated to community cohesion and this is all underpinned by his Christian faith.

We listened to Inderjit who is the original instigator of the City of Sanctuary concept. Inderjit gave an inspired presentation that contained humour as well as serious elements. We watched a DVD based on the experiences of ordinary people in Sheffield, how they had become inspired, motivated and the benefits that it had brought to them and their City. Later the meeting broke into 6 small groups so that everyone had the chance to express their views. The report back from these groups was positive, every single person agreeing that Wolverhampton should become a part of this.

Finally representatives were asked to complete a form indicating their willingness to become a part of a steering committee that would drive the issue forward. 10 individuals did this without any hesitation whatsoever. The first meeting took place in early June. I believe that we in Wolverhampton are being given a chance to rectify past mistakes and to build for the future. Like everyone else I want to be able to live and work in a place in relative safety; this is something that we all want, not just for ourselves but for our families also.

So let it be recorded that the people of Wolverhampton are people with insight who look towards the future and do their very best to create adequate provision for all. Perhaps this should be our legacy for the future generations.

Mike Shelley-Smith
The Enemy Within

By Paul Salahuddin Armstrong
Co-Director, Association of British Muslims

“A nation can survive its fools and even the ambitious. But it cannot survive treason from within. An enemy at the gates is less formidable, for he is known and he carries his banners openly against the city. But the traitor moves among those within the gates freely, his sly whispers rustling through all alleys, heard in the very halls of government itself.

For the traitor appears no traitor; he speaks in the accents familiar to his victim, and he wears their face and their garments and he appeals to the baseness that lies deep in the hearts of all men. He rots the soul of a nation; he works secretly and unknown in the night to undermine the pillars of a city; he infects the body politic so that it can no longer resist. A murderer is less to be feared. The traitor is the plague.”

Marcus Tullius Cicero, from a speech to the Roman Senate.

Today there are some within the Muslim community (ummat ul momineen), who blame all our problems on others; be it America or Israel, consumerism or globalisation, communism or capitalism etc. While all this time, we’re not facing up to the fact that many of the problems our community faces are self-inflicted! There are some calling for jihad, yet they neglect the real jihad - jihad means struggle or striving, although there are some who only interpret it as warfare!

Our beloved Prophet, peace be upon him, said, “the greatest Jihad is with your ego (nafs)”. Our greatest struggle or striving is against our own bad characteristics, against our arrogance, greed, pride, selfishness, cruelty, narrow-mindedness, etc. Is it any wonder that our communities are suffering so badly, when we have neglected this jihad? These are the main things the Prophet was calling us to struggle against! If you have any doubts about this, please study his biography (Sirah)...

However, there is another element in this concept of the enemy within. Plato, a famous Greek philosopher, once compared a nation to a human being. He was illustrating how a state, as a natural institution, reflects human nature. The state will reflect the character of the people within. If we use his analogy, and apply it to our community, we will see there exists not only the enemy within ourselves but within our community too.

Before I go any further, I must stress I am not in any way judging individuals. I have not been appointed as a judge at any court of law of any city or state, nor am I qualified to do so. As I don’t know anyone else’s mind, I believe I should leave that up to Almighty God. Conversely though, I believe it is my duty to highlight serious problems affecting our community, so that we as a community can start to tackle these serious matters in a positive and constructive manner.

Since the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate, false teachings have filled the vacuum left behind. We have for the last couple of hundred years been under attack, from a wave of counterfeit versions of our religion. Well funded by petrol dollars, these became especially well organised and effective during the latter half of the 20th Century.

There are many counterfeits around today. Fortunately, most are easy to identify - there are those which are obvious frauds, then those who are so grumpy, arrogant and hypocritical as to turn most away from following them; indeed, if Muslims didn’t feel so threatened by external influences, who would? But the most dangerous are those who pretend to be Muslims, join us in our worship and activities, but inwardly are out only to exploit us. What better description could be found to describe them than Jesus’ words, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves” Matthew 7:15 (KJV).

Many mullahs arrogate themselves into positions of influence, making the average Muslim feel inferior, always laying on the guilt trip, yet they are themselves often a factor in the many troubles (fitnah) afflicting our community. There are even those who go to such extremes as to criticise Muslims for listening to music (which are often just nasheeds), watching TV, voting, using the internet etc. They claim these are against religious law (Shari’ah), they say we should follow the religious law. But in all honesty, these are not against the Shari’ah. In fact, there is good evidence these things are not forbidden (haraam) and are in fact quite permissible. Even the general guideline of Shari’ah is that anything which is not explicitly forbidden in the Qur’an is permitted. So are they being genuine, or simply trying to make life difficult for their brothers and sisters in Islam?

“Is one whose heart Allah has opened to Islam, so that he has received Enlightenment from Allah, (no better than one hard-hearted)? Woe to those whose hearts are hardened against celebrating the praises of Allah! They are manifestly wandering (in error)” Holy Qur’an 39:22.

(The second half of this article will appear in the next Newsletter)
Congratulations To Devinder Kalhan

Congratulations from all of us go to Devinder Kalhan, who received an MBE in the recent Queen’s Birthday Honours List for services to local government in Birmingham and Inter-Faith relations here in Wolverhampton.

He is currently Group Manager, Adult and Communities Directorate at Birmingham City Council.

Employed by the Council since 1988, Devinder has for many years managed services both for older and younger adults in the city.

He was Chair of the Wolverhampton Inter-faith Council between 2004 and 2010, and has also been recognised for his work bringing faiths together and fostering good community relations in the Black Country.

Outcome of questionnaire on our Newsletter

Many thanks to all those who returned the questionnaire we sent out with our last newsletter – all were very positive in their comments – we hope there are not too many of you out there who held back from responding because they would have been critical!

We appreciated your many suggestions for improvement – these included:

- pleas for more information on forthcoming events of an inter-faith nature, whether promoted by WIFRN or by others
- the need to reflect a balance of all faiths in our articles
- protocols of how to behave when visiting different places of worship
- some sort of inter-faith puzzle or word search.

The winning entry, which included suggestions about including more input from young people and from ordinary people about the importance of their faith, was entered by Mrs. Lesley Cook. She will receive a cheque for £50, thanks to generous donations from two of our Board members. She will in turn Gift Aid this money to the Wolverhampton and District Methodist Church’s Konera Project, which will fund a number of young Rwandans to come to England for leadership training in England next November. We are delighted by Lesley’s choice of project as John Howard, one of our vice-chairmen, has been one of the prime movers in this project and has personally raised over £5,000 for it through his 180-mile walk over 10 days to the Methodist churches within his Circuit.
The Pentecostal Churches
(sometimes referred to as the Black Majority Churches)

The Pentecostal movement covers a number of Christian churches that are separated by doctrinal differences. Apostolic Church is a common term describing churches and groups within the Oneness Movement. This doctrine states that there is one God, a singular spirit who manifests himself in many different ways, including as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. While other church groups such as the New Testament Church of God, the Church of God of Prophecy and the Seventh Day Adventist, are known as Trinitarians. They believe that God exists as three persons; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

The Pentecostal Church comprises of a group men and women who are often dressed in their best suits, dresses and flamboyant hats. Members are committed to the teachings of Christ which include repentance (being sorry for our sin and resolving to live a life free from sin), water baptism by total immersion and living a Christ-like life. Pentecostals generally believe that baptism is the outward sign that demonstrates you have repented of your sin and accepted Jesus into your life. Baptism is a pre-requisite for membership. Most churches require individuals to attend preparation classes prior to baptism.

In the late 70’s and early 80’s a great deal of interest was shown in the Black church movement and this led to a series of recordings by the BBC/TV and radio in an attempt to educate the nation about the ‘Black church’. Pentecostals are admired for their charismatic way of worship, by their melodious and exuberant singing,, clapping of their hands as told to do in Psalms, the beating of the drums and the playing of a range of musical instruments and the inspiring and very powerful sermon from the Pastor/leader. In essence, they always put everything into their worship, as if it is their last opportunity to give adoration to God.

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The Pentecostal Church is a place of worship, a place of social gathering and a place of refuge; it is an awesome and vibrant place to be and you will always be stimulated and excited in a Pentecostal Church as you are invited to participate in worship and to ‘Make a joyful noise unto the Lord’ with melodious singing, which is often accompanied by a full musical band comprising of the organ and or piano, the drums rhythm and bass guitar, tambourines and the clapping of hands. It is little wonder that a number of prominent popular artists, including those who sing gospel and jazz, had their beginnings in the church where they sang in the Church choir; Beverley Knight, and Remission Gospel Choir to name a few.

The doors of Pentecostal churches are often open and most churches have services at least three times per week. Meetings are organised to cater for the needs of all members of the congregation. There are sometimes separate meetings for the men, women and the young people.

Finance and the Pentecostal Church

The Pentecostal Church believes in tithing, which is voluntarily giving 10% of your income to the church. Tithes and offerings are used for the day to day upkeep and running of the church. Additional income is raised through a range of fundraising events such as the selling of goods and products, the holding of plays and gospel concerts.

Celebrations

The majority of Pentecostal churches celebrate the range of Christian festivals including Easter and Christmas. The birth of Jesus and His purpose to save mankind are therefore emphasised as the real meaning of Christmas, and Easter focuses closely on the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The ascension of Jesus is the Christian doctrine from the New Testament, telling of the moment when the resurrected Jesus was taken up to heaven in his resurrected body (See Acts 1:9-11). Another event that is celebrated on the seventh Sunday after Easter is Whitsun. This commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Disciples of Christ, as described in Acts chapter 2.

From the Cradle to the Grave

The Pentecostal church provides support and care from the cradle to the grave. Members of the church and the community are encouraged to have their babies presented to God for Christian dedication, commonly referred to as christening.

Teachings about God and what it means to be a Christian are delivered at the weekly Sunday school for young people and adults. Consequently, all are challenged to study the weekly Sunday school lesson and to remember
the ‘golden text’ or memory verse, which usually sums up what the lesson is about. Learning is closely monitored by the Sunday school teacher and most churches give annual awards to young people for attendance, good behaviour and achievements at Sunday/Sabbath School.

Activities for young people
Most Churches have between 5 to 30 children and young people under the age of 16 who attend regularly. In addition to participating in Sunday school, most churches run a weekly Youth club which provides a safe environment where children and young people can participate in a range of recreational activities. In addition to weekly youth club, various activities are sometimes arranged during the main holiday periods. For example, some churches run what is known as vocational Bible school during the summer holiday. This is a mixture of recreational activities plus the opportunity to learn more about the Bible and what it means to be a young Christian.

Activities for the elderly
With the number of senior citizens on the increase, most Pentecostal churches provide advice, support and activities for those in the golden years of their lives. This is delivered through regular visits and assistance with, for instance, shopping, and writing letters. A number of churches including the Bethel United Church of Jesus Christ (Apostolic) and the New Testament Church of God in Wednesfield run a day centre for senior citizens from the church and the community. This provides an opportunity for them to meet each other on a weekly basis and to socialise and take part in recreational activities to keep them healthy and active and to stimulate their minds. Members also go on a range of social outings to different parts of the country. Some centres organise an annual holiday for their senior citizens. These provisions are possible because local churches receive external funding to organise, support and run different recreational activities. However, most churches fund different activities from their treasury and are ably given support and assistance from the young adults in the church.

Conventions
Most Pentecostal churches hold a range of conventions for example Men’s Convocation, Women’s Convention and Youth Conventions. But by far the most exciting and well-attended event is the annual convention. This is usually a five-day event that is attended by churches across the UK and held at different venues across the country. A popular venue that is used in the West Midlands is the Bethel Convention Centre in West Bromwich. This has an auditorium with a seating capacity of 2500 and a number of seminar rooms. You will find the convention date in the diaries of most members who look forward to booking a week off work to attend this annual event where they receive focused teaching on specific topics that are linked to a theme. The annual meeting provides members with the opportunity to meet and socialise with families and friends from across the country and delegates from abroad. Everyone always strive to attend the annual Convention.

The Church in the community
The Pentecostal church has a strong presence in the community which is not always given recognition. Members of the church contribute to community cohesion by going into schools to deliver assemblies and taking part in events such as Black History Month.

Churches also have an outreach team which visits individuals, who are sick, housebound, in hospitals or in sheltered accommodation for the elderly. For example Bethel United Church of Jesus Christ (Apostolic) (Eastfield, Wolverhampton) visits a local care home two Sundays each month to hold a service with residents. A number of Pentecostal Churches in Wolverhampton host the United Christian Broadcast (UCB) Prayer line, which has a team of dedicated prayer warriors who staff the line and respond to prayer requests by praying for callers over the phone. UBC lines operate from Bethel United Church: All Saints, The Church of God of Prophesy

If you are feeling low and need to be uplifted, why not visit a Pentecostal Church in your area? For details of locations of Pentecostal Churches in Wolverhampton, see the WIFRN website on http://www.wifrn.org.uk/.

Vilma Jarrett-Harvey is a member of Bethel United Church of Jesus Christ Apostolic (Eastfield, Wolverhampton). She is also a Board member of the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith and Regeneration Network.

A typical week at a Pentecostal Church - programme of activities

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<td>Fasting</td>
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<td>Youth club</td>
<td>Fundraising</td>
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<td>Divine Worship</td>
<td>Senior Citizens’ Club</td>
<td>Fasting and Prayer meeting</td>
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<td>Gospel Concert</td>
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<td>7.00</td>
<td>Evening Worship</td>
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WIFRN NEWS ISSUE 45 - JULY 2011 - 7
Forthcoming Events for the next Quarter

Saturday July 9th (1.30-4.45) Satsang meeting at Friends Meeting House (for more information on Satsang, visit www.satsang-companionship.org.uk)

Sunday July 10th 11a.m. - Civic Sunday - St Peter’s Collegiate Church – with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham as Guest Preacher.

Saturday July 23rd - WIFRN Annual Pilgrimage (see attached flier – please book as soon as possible to ensure a place on the coach)

Monday August 22nd - Krishna Jayanti (Birth of Krishna) You are all welcome to attend all or part of the celebration from 7.00 p.m-midnight at the Sri Krishan Temple on Penn Road.

August 1st-30th - Ramadan

Wednesday August 31st – Eid-ul-Fitr – Feast of Fast Breaking

Wednesday September 28th – WIFRN AGM and Social - City College, Paget Road

Saturday October 8th (p.m.) - WIFRN visit to places of Worship in Bilston

November 20-26th - Inter-Faith Week

Saturday November 26th - WIFRN Annual Conference ‘Can the Big Society deliver Social Justice?’ (details in next newsletter)

The Patrons of WIFRN is Lord Bilston.

The Officers of WIFRN:

President: Rt. Rev. Clive Gregory, Bishop of Wolverhampton (Christian)

Vice-President: Sehdev Bimal (Hindu)

Chairman: Harun Rashid (Muslim)

Vice-Chairmen: Rev. John Howard (Christian) & Prem Lal (Ravidassi)

Treasurer: Ganesh De (Hindu)

Secretary: Erik Pearse (Christian)

The Board of WIFRN:

Paul Armstrong (Muslim)

Raj Babbar (Sikh)

Rev. John Barnett (Christian)

Rev. David Belcher (Christian)

Parveen Brigue (Hindu)

Deirdre Burke (Jew)

Jaswinder Chaggar (Sikh)

Bhajan Devis (Sikh)

Martin Gomberg (Jew)

Vilma Jarrett-Harvey (Christian)

Rajesh Jain (Jain)

Rev. David Lavender (Christian)

Rev. Jim McManus (Christian)

Vidya Midha (Buddhist)

Mohamed Mustafa (Muslim)

Bill Nicholls (Christian)

Gurdev Rai (Sikh)

Satya Pal Sharma (Hindu)

Dr. Opinderjit takhar (Sikh)

Janette Watson (Christian)

Rev. David Wright (Christian)

The Staff of WIFRN: John Waterfield, Mike Shelley-Smith, Gurdev (Devi) Bansal

Subscriptions: If we think you have not yet paid a subscription, you will find a copy of the subscription form enclosed/attached. It helps us to keep going and saves wasting admin time chasing you!

Drop us a line

The next edition (issue 46) of WIFRN News will be published in October 2011.
If you have any news, articles, adverts or reports to send in, Religious Festival dates to inform us about, or any other events, then please contact the office as soon as possible. The deadline for the issue is Thursday 15th September 2011.