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IFW NEWS

Newsletter of Interfaith Wolverhampton

Editorial

BY DR BASMA IKRAM

It is with great sadness that we announce the resignation of Yusuf Shafi as Deputy Chair Communications for Interfaith Wolverhampton. Yusuf has served Interfaith Wolverhampton for many years, and he will be missed.

In the interim, I will be taking responsibility for the newsletter until the foreseeable future. I hope you enjoy this quarter's edition; the Interfaith team have been incredibly busy, hosting numerous events across Wolverhampton in an effort to promote interfaith dialogue and improve community cohesion. In today's world, it often feels like every day brings news about a new conflict or disaster. During such trying times, it can be easy to lose hope but it is specifically during these times that we need to be making more of an effort to connect with one another and to understand that what unites us all as humans is far greater than what divides us. The work Interfaith Wolverhampton does helps to contribute to a brighter future.

This newsletter would not be possible without the hard work of Devi and Paul Rayner who assist greatly in its compilation. I sincerely apologise for any inaccuracies, omissions or mistakes.

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VARIOUS SPEAKERS AND ATTENDEES AT THE INTERFAITH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Interfaith Annual Conference 2022

On Saturday 26th November 2022, Interfaith Wolverhampton held their annual conference on “Healthy Faith” at The Royal School, Penn Road, Wolverhampton. We would like to thank the principal Mr Mark Hayward, and his wonderful site and catering staff for helping with the success of this event.

A special thank you also for David Dehar, a Year 12 pupil at The Royal School, who was the host for this event. It was so inspiring to see such a confident and capable young host at such an event.



VARIOUS SPEAKERS AND ATTENDEES AT THE INTERFAITH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The conference consisted of speakers from various faith backgrounds such as Sikh, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and Christian discuss what ‘healthy faith’ looks like from the perspective of their religious beliefs. This was followed by a lively discussion and question and answer session with the audience.

We were pleased to see so many different religious groups coming together during the conference, and to see our members who are always so supportive of our activities. This conference was a wonderful demonstration of community cohesion, togetherness and embracing diversity.

Our next annual conference will be held in November 2023, discussing the topic “Alzheimer’s Disease’. Please see list of scheduled upcoming events for more details.

**“A healthy
faith is one
that has
aligned in
word,
thought,
and
action”**

-Michael Gungor

Holocaust Memorial Day 2023

BY MARTIN GOMBERG

Background to Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD)

1942 - 17 December: The Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden told a hushed House of Commons that 'reliable reports' had confirmed 'Hitler's oft repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe...'. MPs responded to the Government's shocking announcement with a spontaneous moment of silence, which was reported to be the first in the history of the chamber.

1945 - 27 January: Liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp.

2000 27 January: Stockholm declaration - representatives from 46 governments around the world met in Stockholm to discuss Holocaust education, remembrance and research.

2001 – 2005 UK Government had responsibility for running HMD, organised through the Home Office.

2005 – HMD Trust, a charity funded by UK Government, set up. www.hmd.org.uk

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) encourages remembrance in a world scarred by genocide. We promote and support Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) – the international day on 27 January to remember the 6 million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, alongside the millions of other people murdered under Nazi persecution of other groups and during more recent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

2022 - 15 December: Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Leader of the Opposition Sir Keir Starmer joined Lindsay Hoyle, the Speaker of the House of Commons, as he repeated the unprecedented tribute back in 1942 by leading a one-minute silence to commemorate its 80th anniversary.



COUNCILLOR JASBINDER DEHAR (CHAIR
INTERFAITH WOLVERHAMPTON)



MARTIN GOMBERG (TREASURER
INTERFAITH WOLVERHAMPTON)



BISHOP CLIVE (NOW RETIRED)

What happens in Wolverhampton

Each year HMDT publishes a different theme for HMD. Interfaith Wolverhampton works with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team at the City of Wolverhampton to organise a commemoration based on the annual theme by bringing together people from a range of communities to remember the Holocaust and more recent genocides.

2023 - 27 January: HMD Theme Ordinary People

Ordinary people can be perpetrators, the persecuted, rescuers, bystanders. Ordinary places and ordinary objects can take on new meanings – a stadium, a railway carriage, a suitcase.

On 27 January 2023 we shared readings based on these ideas:

What is abnormal is that I am normal. That I survived the Holocaust and went on to love beautiful girls, to talk, to write, to have toast and tea and live my life – that is what is abnormal.

Elie Wiesel, survivor of the Holocaust

Genocide is facilitated by ordinary people. Ordinary people turn a blind eye, believe propaganda, join murderous regimes. And those who are persecuted, oppressed and murdered in genocide aren't persecuted because of crimes they've committed – they are persecuted simply because they are ordinary people who belong to a particular group.

Ordinary people were involved in all aspects of the Holocaust, Nazi persecution of other groups, and in the genocides that took place in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. Ordinary people were perpetrators, bystanders, rescuers, witnesses – and ordinary people were victims.

Perpetrators as ordinary people

Ordinary people were policemen involved in rounding up victims, secretaries typing the records of genocide, dentists and doctors carrying out selections, ordinary people were neighbours wielding machetes in Rwanda, school teachers turned concentration camp guards in Bosnia.

And as a five year old, I could stand at the edge of the clearing where the trains were being loaded. People like sardines in those wooden trucks. And the people loading them in – they were railway men, they didn't look terribly different from the railway men who check my tickets these days – they looked like ordinary people. Dr Martin Stern MBE, Holocaust survivor

Jean Louis Mazimpaka, a survivor of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, recalls that: *When the killing started, to be honest, everyone was involved. Our neighbours, friends, but we didn't know the killings were to the extent of what happened.*

Persecuted people as ordinary people

People may think that they have nothing to do with my story. But what happened to me, could happen to them – to people like yourself. It may sound too hard to believe but this doesn't happen to strangers who live far away. I'm just an ordinary person. These terrible things can happen to people like us. Kemal Pervanić, survivor, Bosnia

Rescuers as ordinary people

Rescuers are also often portrayed as extraordinary, or superhuman, with amazing bravery and skill. This may be true in some instances, but many rescuers describe themselves in very simple terms.

Sir Nicholas Winton, a young stockbroker, rescued 669 children from Czechoslovakia, bringing them to the UK thereby sparing them from the horrors of the Holocaust. He said: *Why are you making such a big deal out of it? I just helped a little; I was in the right place at the right time.*

Bystanders as ordinary people

Most people living under a murderous regime don't take an active role in a genocide. They do not become perpetrators or rescuers. They let the genocide take place around them, and they take no action to contribute to it, yet neither do they take action to challenge it, prevent it or to stop it happening.

Today - Ordinary people

We are all ordinary people today who can be extraordinary in our actions. We can all make decisions to challenge prejudice, stand up to hatred, to speak out against identity-based persecution, to shop responsibly.

Ordinary people are also the ones who drive Holocaust Memorial Day, who lead on community commemorations, who support and encourage everyone around them to take part in remembrance and education projects.

Next year - Please join us if you are able at 11 am 27 January 2024, Cenotaph, St Peter's Gardens, St Peters Square to mark Holocaust Memorial Day on the theme: *Fragility of Freedom*.



COUNCILLOR MICHAEL HARDACRE
(DEPUTY MAYOR OF WOLVERHAMPTON
- NOW MAYOR)



SIR JOHN CRABTREE OBE (HIS MAJESTY'S
LORD-LIEUTENANT OF WEST MIDLANDS)

WORLD FAITHS ON UNITY & COMMUNITY

AGAIN, TRULY I TELL YOU, IF TWO OF YOU AGREE ON EARTH ABOUT ANYTHING YOU ASK, IT WILL BE DONE FOR YOU BY MY FATHER IN HEAVEN. FOR WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED IN MY NAME, I AM THERE AMONG THEM.

**CHRISTIANITY, THE BIBLE,
MATTHEW 18:19-20**

ISRAEL'S RECONCILIATION WITH GOD CAN BE ACHIEVED ONLY WHEN THEY ARE ALL ONE BROTHERHOOD.

JUDAISM, TALMUD, MENAHO, 27A

SURELY ALL BELIEVERS ARE BROTHERS. SO MAKE PEACE BETWEEN BROTHERS, AND FEAR ALLAH THAT MERCY MAY BE SHOWN TO YOU.

ISLAM, THE HOLY QUR'AN, 49:11

LET ALL MANKIND BE THY SECT.

**SIKHISM, ADI GRANTH, JAPUJI
28, M.1, P.6**

HAPPY IS THE UNITY OF THE SANGHA.
HAPPY IS THE DISCIPLINE OF THE UNITED ONES.

BUDDHISM, DHAMMAPADA 194

MEET TOGETHER, SPEAK TOGETHER,
LET YOUR MINDS BE OF ONE ACCORD,
AS THE GODS OF OLD, BEING OF ONE MIND,
ACCEPTED THEIR SHARE OF THE SACRIFICE.

HINDUISM, RIG VEDA, 10.191.2-4

Remembering Srebrenica

On Tuesday 11th July 2023, the City of Wolverhampton Council commemorated 'Remembering Srebrenica', an event that occurred in July 1995 when thousands of men and boys were systematically murdered and buried in mass graves. The victims, who were Muslim, were selected for death on the basis of their identity. It was the worst atrocity on European soil since the Second World War.

The event was hosted by the The Right Worshipful Mayor of Wolverhampton, Cllr Dr Mike Hardacre. Guest speakers, including Cllr Jasbinder Dehar, Chair of Interfaith Wolverhampton and representatives from Srebenica.org and the Bosnia & Herzegovina UK network, shared poignant messages before the raising of the flag.

It was a solemn occasion, and a reminder that encouraging discrimination and division can lead to great evil, and that every one has a shared responsibility to protect the rights of their fellow humans.



**“BY
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**HIS MAJESTY
KING CHARLES III**

Civic Sunday 2023

DEACON LINDA GILSON

"It was a fantastic day!"

The Civic Service this year took place on Sunday 4th June, returning to its traditional scheduling, close to the start of the new municipal year.

The Rector of St Peter's Collegiate Church, The Reverend Prebendary David Wright welcomed the Mayor and Mayoress, Councillors, and everyone in the congregation. He reminded us that it was an opportunity to pray for our Mayor and Councillors at the beginning of their period in office, and for the officers and staff within the Council who support them and provide the many services. In welcoming us to St Peter's Church he described its importance in the life of the city and how it seeks to serve all the people of Wolverhampton whatever their faith may be or may not be, and that all are welcome.

As part of the service, there was an "Act of Commitment" to serve. This began with Councillor Jasbinder Dehar, Chair of Interfaith Wolverhampton inviting The Mayor, Councillor Dr Michael Hardacre to stand. She asked him:

"Mr Mayor, as first citizen of the City of Wolverhampton, you are called to serve and guide our City, to represent our City and its citizens to other people and places. Will you commit yourself to the service of our City and its citizens and to carrying out your duties to the best of your ability?"

The Mayor responded:

"I do so commit myself, and will serve the City of Wolverhampton and its citizens to the best of my ability."



Members of the Wolverhampton Council were also invited to stand and were asked a similar question and they responded with their commitment.

It was then the turn of the whole congregation to be asked to stand and commit themselves to supporting the Mayor and Councillors.

This was followed by the Choir singing "The Hallelujah Chorus" by George Handel. The music throughout the service was fabulous. The Choir led the congregation in singing the hymns, and also sang another anthem - "Cantique de Jean Racine" by Gabriel Faure.

The Prayers were led by representatives from Interfaith Wolverhampton, each offering a short prayer in their own faith tradition:

Shobha Patel from the Satya Sai Organisation representing the Hindu Faith, Jaswinder Singh Chaggar representing the Sikh Faith, Ittikhar Ahmed Raj, Chair of the Muslim Council of Mosques, Martin Gomberg representing the Jewish Faith, Jill Parker representing the Christian Faith and Mr Dev Suman and a Monk from Buddha Vihara Wolverhampton.

The Prayers of Penitence were led by The Reverend Michael McKearney, Blessed Carlo Acutis Catholic Parish, and the Bible Readings were read by The Mayor and Councillor Stephen Simkins, Deputy Leader of the Council.

It was my privilege as this year's Chaplain to the Mayor, to give the sermon on the theme of service and the Mayor's theme of "Moving Forward Together", and how we together can build communities and a better future, and strive for life in all its fullness for all people to the glory of God.

The service ended with the Rector saying the Blessing. This was the Rev David Wright's last Civic Service before leaving to take up a new appointment in Valletta, Malta. We ask God's blessing on him and his family as they move, and give thanks for his support, in so many ways, of the people of this city and of Interfaith Wolverhampton.



Interaction with schools

Wolverhampton Interfaith has for many years organised visits to places of worship on behalf of schools. By educating young people, who are our future, about different faiths we aim to promote understanding , increase knowledge & encourage tolerance.

We are indebted to all volunteers who give so freely of their time to go into schools, act as guides at places of worship, and give information about their faith.

Places of worship who open their doors, again add a dimension to understanding that pictures alone cannot.

Schools are provided with information regarding appropriate dress and full terms and conditions for the visit at the time of booking. We provide an evaluation form afterwards which we monitor to see if any aspects can be improved in the future.

As can be imagined a considerable amount of administration time is involved but this year alone we will have interacted with 1,865 pupils and staff which is a statistic, as an organisation, I feel we can all be proud of.

STATISTICS ON SCHOOL VISITS

BETWEEN JANUARY & MARCH 2023
THERE WERE 7 VISITS INVOLVING
431 PUPILS

BETWEEN APRIL & DECEMBER WE
HAVE 17 VISITS OR PRESENTATIONS
TAKING PLACE OR BOOKED
INVOLVING 1,434 PUPILS

REQUESTED FOR 2024-5 BOOKED SO
FAR 2 INVOLVING 60 PUPILS .



STUDENTS FROM STOW HEATH PRIMARY SCHOOL DURING A SCHOOL VISIT TO THE BAITUL ATTA MOSQUE, WILLENHALL

Interfaith Week 2023

Interfaith Week nationally this year runs from Sunday 12th to Sunday 19th November 2023 and incorporates our conference on Saturday 18th November entitled 'Alzheimer's Disease'.

The aims of the week are ;

***Strengthening good interfaith relations at all levels**

***Increasing awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the UK , in particular celebrating and building on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and wider society**

***Increasing understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs**

The week is linked to Remembrance Sunday to encourage people to remember together the contributions of all faiths and none and to consider how best to create a just, peaceful, and harmonious world.

Is your place of worship planning to do anything special during this week ? If so please email details to admin@ifwton.org.uk and we will try and publicise this amongst our members.

Interfaith Wolverhampton AGM 2023

Interfaith Wolverhampton held their annual general meeting (AGM) 2023 on Tuesday 12th September at St.Bartholomews Church, Penn. Attendees enjoyed an informative and engaging historical talk and tour of the church by Reverend Ben Whitmore. After, the items on the agenda were discussed including a keynote talk by Suffia Perveen (Lead of Ethnic Minority Council and Wolverhampton Equality and Diversity Partnership) on the incredible work undertaken and the achievements of the Faith New Deal Project. After the meeting, delicious refreshments were served and attendees had a chance to chat.



Interfaith Wolverhampton schedule of events 2023

November 2023

12th - 19th National Inter-Faith Week Details at <https://www.interfaithweek.org/>

18th (Saturday) Interfaith Wolverhampton Annual Conference at The Royal School. "Faith and Dementia"

21st (Tuesday) "Bring and Share" 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. The Buddhist Faith.
Speaker: To be confirmed

December 2023

19th (Tuesday) "Networking"	Christmas Bring & Share lunchtime meeting No Speaker.
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21st (Thursday) Interfaith Office Closed for Christmas

January 2024

3rd (Wednesday) Interfaith Office open again

27th (Saturday) Holocaust Memorial Day - "The Fragility of Freedom" 11 a.m. at the Cenotaph in St.Peter's Gardens, St.Peter's Square, Wolverhampton City Centre (between St.Peter's Church and the Civic Centre)

Contact us

We've moved! Please note we have moved our premises from WVCA Temple Street to the following location:

St Bartholomew's Church. Church Hill, Penn, Wolverhampton, WV4 5JB

If you have any news you'd like shared in the IFW newsletter please email us at;
admin@ifwton.org.uk