

Fife Interfaith Group

Newsletter 2015



Fire and Water

In late October, about thirty years ago, I set off with two friends after a nightshift at Methil Fire Station for a fishing trip off Anstruther. We were towing a small boat and this was to be her maiden voyage. On arrival we found the sea to be choppy with a swell running. 'Nothing we can't handle' we told each other. We were wrong.

Shortly after leaving the harbour it became clear that we had misjudged the worsening sea state. We were thrown into the water as the boat capsized in heavy seas. Intense cold drained strength from our limbs; swimming felt difficult and uncoordinated. However, all three of us made it to the shore, scrambling over slippery sea weed covered rocks by the harbour as the waves pounded around us. With freezing hands we climbed a metal ladder on the harbour wall. We were met by a reproachful Harbour Master who had witnessed the drama and told that we had to get warm quickly as we were in the early stages of hypothermia.

In recent weeks memories of this experience have returned to me as the plight of refugees at sea has been broadcast; I have been reminded in particular of the utter helplessness of a person against the sea, the most powerful and merciless of the elements. Frightening as our experience was, it is as nothing compared to the terror of refugees who have been thrown into the sea with their young children. The anguish which parents must experience in such circumstances, hearing their children's desperate cries for help and powerless to help them, is too unbearable to contemplate. What, we may wonder, possesses parents to entrust their children to unscrupulous crews in overcrowded unseaworthy boats on seas which can be subject to violent storms. An answer to that question is contained in the lines of a poem by the Somalian refugee Warner Shire which the actor Benedict Cumberbatch is currently reading during the interval of *Hamlet* :

'You understand that no one puts children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land.'

The constant unrelenting threat to these families in their homes in Syria from gas attacks and ever larger barrel bombs which may contain explosives, shrapnel, flammable fuel and chlorine, has clearly become so unbearable that any alternative, however hazardous, has to be taken to save their lives. Refugees from the Syrian war zones will arrive in Fife in the near future. Many of them will be suffering from post traumatic stress; all are desperately seeking a place of safety.

There is a paradox at the heart of this situation with regard to Faith. Most of these refugees are people of faith and it is their faith in a higher good that will have sustained them and given them comfort during the darkest hours of war and their subsequent journey here. Some secularists might argue, however, that it is religious strife which underlies the crisis in Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East. The paradox is resolved, however, when we consider that it is not religion which is the problem but rather the toxic distortion of religion allied to the pursuit of political objectives.

We may reasonably expect that when refugees arrive here one of their first objectives will be to locate the faith communities with whom they share their faith traditions. Fife Interfaith Group has written to the Chief Executive of Fife Council to state that we stand ready to assist with this process in any way we can. Representatives from our various faiths have offered to convene at reception centres to welcome refugees and signpost them to their various faith communities. In doing so we will not only make them feel welcome but will demonstrate to them that religious faiths can live in harmony and offer each other support as we have done since our group was founded ten years ago. There can be no better way of letting these families know that they have truly arrived at a safe haven.

Francis McFarlane (Chairman) Fife Interfaith Group



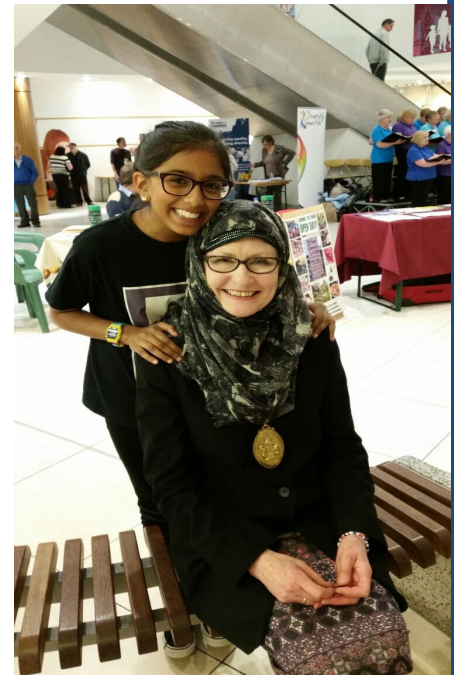
Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, even so let one cultivate a boundless love towards all beings. - **Khuddaka Patha**
from **Metta Sutta** Fife Interfaith Group - On Facebook

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The Jewels of Islam

As part of Fife Diversity Week the Jewels of Islam a woman's group based in the Islamic Centre in St Mary's Road Kirkcaldy, held a "Meet the Jewels of Islam" event on Saturday 12 September 2015 at 12noon. The Group were formed to combat prejudice and misunderstanding and let everyone know what Islam really stands for and the purpose of the meeting was to introduce themselves to people who wanted to know more about Islam.

There was a place for discussion, henna painting, dressing in a Hijab for those who would like to try and as always lots of good Asian food. The meeting was well attended and there were some new people who came along and enjoyed the experience for the first time.



The next day was Diversity Gala Day in the Kingsgate Shopping Centre in Dunfermline and the group manned a stall for the day with information about the group and Islam and again people passing were offered a chance to try the Hijab and many tried and enjoyed the experience including the Depute Provost of Fife Kay Morrison, who is shown in the picture with Ramiza Ahmad of "Jewels of Islam"

On the 12 September 2015 during Fife Diversity Week an event called "Try Interfaith" was held in the chapel of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints in Dunfermline. A panel of 4 Faiths had been organised. Daryl Watson, Latterday Saints; Samarah Haq, represented the Muslims; Behdokht Eliasieh represented the Baha'i; Colm Wilson represented the Quakers. Each member of the panel gave a 5 minute talk about their Faith and beliefs and after this the meeting became a very lively question and answer session. After the discussion refreshments were served. There was then a short drive to the Dunfermline Mosque where the group were received by the Imam and two members who had responsibilities in the Mosque. A guided tour was given and members and could see all the vast improvements and redecoration the Mosque had undertaken by their own labours and finance which includes a large area which is the Community Hub for Muslims in Dunfermline. Questions were asked and answered and refreshments were again served courtesy of the Mosque.

The visit finished with the Chairman of the Fife interfaith Group hosting a meeting as to how we can help immigrants moving into Fife. It is proposed that Fife Interfaith Group and will work with the Muslim Community on this once the immigrants arrive.



Fife Interfaith 3rd Annual Lecture
November 2014

For our Annual Lecture last year, we were very pleased to welcome Frances Hume who has worked as Development Officer for Interfaith Scotland for the last seven years and has visited us many times to assist us in arranging events and giving good advice.

Her talk entitled “Journey of Faith”, was held in the architectural splendour of the Auld Kirk in Kirkcaldy and started with her childhood in Northern Ireland where it was the norm for everyone to profess a Faith and when she came to Britain to study at University it came as quite a shock to find that it was not the same everywhere and many people she was now working with had no Faith at all. Nevertheless she continued her own way and eventually graduated and wanted to do something worthwhile for an occupation.

She worked as a volunteer teacher in India for 6 months and on returning to Britain worked in Christian Aid before taking a Post Graduate Certificate to widen her opportunities. She then worked on a refugee project in Glasgow, then with Action for Children, the Iona Community and Faith in Community in Scotland before taking up her present position with Interfaith Scotland. All these positions gave her new challenges and gave her new perspectives.

She spoke of the challenges attached to her present position and then asked the audience to split into groups and questions and situations were posed to challenge the groups which led to many discussions and eventually a summary from each group as to how they would have re-acted and perhaps solved the problems. This was a novel approach and everyone enjoyed these challenges.

Everyone appreciated the points she had raised and especially the challenges given by the situations she had given out to the audience. It was a memorable evening which had given much food for thought to those who attended.

Fife Interfaith Group was founded in 2006 and the aims of the group are to bring together the faith communities of Fife in a spirit of dialogue and co-operation for the promotion of the common good. To develop sharing and understanding, inform and educate and be a positive force for good relations between faith communities in Fife. To encourage interfaith and multi-cultural awareness and understanding in local schools. To support the wider interfaith movement by promoting links between Fife Interfaith group and other interfaith bodies at both the Scottish and UK level. If you want to know more please find us on Facebook as Fife Interfaith Group and the Jewels of Islam.

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Interfaith is the way ahead and can be fun while learning about others!

Fife Interfaith Group Fourth Annual Interfaith Lecture

Bishop David Chillingworth of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane



24 November 2015 at 7pm

Holy Trinity Episcopalian Church

Dunfermline

Free Event

All welcome

A new member a new perspective!

I'm not sure if it happens to everyone who comes along to the Interfaith group for the first time, but I've been asked to introduce myself and the faith community I belong to!

My name is Kevin Flett, and I've recently been appointed minister to the West End Congregational Church in Kirkcaldy, this is in addition to having been part-time minister to the Pathhead Congregational Church for the past three years. Prior to becoming part of Congregational church life, I was involved in Baptist ministry, both full and part-time for around twenty years.

Congregationalism has a long history both across the UK and here in Scotland. In England and Wales there are many congregational churches which trace their roots back to the early 17th century, while in Scotland it was the 19th century that most congregational churches emerged. Congregationalists have long been in the mainstream of Scottish church life, often at the progressive, liberal end of the theological spectrum, though among the key features of congregationalism is a sense of independence, both from the state and from any fixed creed or theological dogma.

A majority of Congregational churches in Scotland opted to join the United Reformed Church in the year 2000, and although the name "Congregational" was lost from the title of those churches, they still carry forward many of the principles and values of congregationalism. However, at the time around forty congregational churches opted not to join the URC, and whilst some asserted their individuality by becoming totally independent, most decided to form the Scottish area of the Congregational Federation. Around 30 Scottish churches are still part of the Federation which has around 300 churches across Great Britain, there are other umbrella bodies of Congregationalists for example in Wales and Ireland.

Whilst not unique, Kirkcaldy is one of very few places in Scotland where there are not just one but two Congregational churches. Both are quite independent, and vary in terms of their ties to the life of the Federation. The Pathhead church is more evangelical in its background, while the West End church sits very much within the liberal tradition. As time moves on these distinctions are diminishing, with both churches seeing themselves within an emerging progressive expression of Christian faith. Very much linked to our independent, non-dogmatic heritage, we seek to be inclusive in our approach to life and faith, approaching the bible and wider theology with open and exploring minds, seeking to present an expression of Christian faith which is relevant for people today. Our church buildings are noted for their simplicity, and our approach to worship is equally straightforward.

As a small denomination it is easy for us to feel a bit lost, however we feel we have a role to play in offering a different perspective on Christian faith and the approach to church life. Alongside our independence, there is a real sense of local responsibility and accountability, as well as a desire to look beyond traditional denominations and even separate faith traditions so as to contribute to positive interaction and increased understanding of our shared values.

Thank you Kevin, we are thrilled to have you as part of Fife Interfaith Group's diversity.