

INTER FAITH EXCHANGE

An Occasional Newsletter for
Christians working with other Faith Communities
Number 7, Winter 2005

'Inter Faith Exchange'

Welcome to the seventh issue of an occasional ecumenical mailing for Christians involved in inter faith relations in Britain and Ireland, produced by Churches Together in England and the Churches' Commission on Inter Faith Relations.

We aim to include news of recent inter faith developments, notices of forthcoming events, together with a few reviews, reflections, and features.

The views expressed within contributions to Inter Faith Exchange are not necessarily those of Churches' Commission on Inter Faith Relations.

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Editorial

Inter Faith Exchange appears again after a break of almost two years. Within these two years much has happened within inter faith relations in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. This issue seeks to highlight some of these developments. Sarah Hall writes of POLIN 2004, an important ecumenical study visit to Poland that explored the cultural roots of modern Judaism and remembered the Holocaust. A second visit may be possible. Ray Trudgian, adviser on Jewish-Christian relations for the Methodist Inter Faith Relations Committee, shares his concern for the rise of anti-Semitic activity in Britain. John Parry, Convenor of the United Reformed Church Inter Faith Relations Committee, reflects on why young Muslim men from Leeds willingly became murderers on 7 July 2005. Churches Together in England has compiled a statement, listing its operating principles relating to other faith communities. Ann Noonan, of the Catholic Conference of England and Wales, reports on a major conference to mark the 40th Anniversary of Nostra Aetate. There are news items from around our nations, book reviews, and information about resources and events.

A pivotal moment for inter faith relations in our nations was the detonation of four bombs in London on 7 July 2005. As soon as the news broke, statements condemning the act

flowed, some driven by fear that the perpetrators would be found to be Muslim. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and the Muslim Council of Britain jointly stated, 'The scriptures and the traditions of both the Muslim and Christian communities repudiate the use of such violence. Religious precepts cannot be used to justify such crimes, which are completely contrary to our teaching and practice'.

Imam Abduljalil Sajid writing on behalf of imams in London and the Southern counties urged: 'We ask Muslims everywhere, turn to the Qur'an as your guide and the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) as your example whose every act was an act of peace and worship, and reject the poisonous hatred of those who seek to stain our faith with the blood of innocents. We ask Muslims to turn to prayers and fasts during these difficult days ahead.' Religious leaders in Scotland a day later stated: 'The scriptures and teachings of all our faiths.....denounce the use of all indiscriminate violence. To justify such actions in the name of any religion is totally contrary to our values and practice'.¹ Fearing that there would be hate crimes against some faith communities, The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom consulted with the Commission for Racial Equality, the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Chief Fire Officers' Association, with advice from the Crown Prosecution Service, to produce an agreed text of its

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1. See *Inter Faith Update*, the newsletter of the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom, Summer 2005, for further quotes from statements such as these: ifnet@interfaith.org.uk

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document, 'Looking After One Another: The Safety and Security of Our Faith Communities' It was released the weekend after the bombing and circulated to the 112 members of the Network and local authority officials with responsibility for faith issues (downloadable from www.interfaith.org.uk). The Commission for Racial Equality, through its Safe Communities initiative, set up an 'observatory' to monitor community tensions, including attacks on people or places of worship.

The days ahead were to be difficult, especially when it was known that the four bombers were from West Yorkshire. On the positive side, there were numerous inter faith acts of solidarity and remembrance. The Nottingham Muslim Action Group, for instance, called a Multi-faith Peace Rally on 23 July. In West Yorkshire, Peace Vigils were held in Bradford, Kirklees (a place where the Muslim community also signed a statement absolutely condemning the bombers), Leeds and Keighley. In London on 21 July a most moving Multi Faith Service of Remembrance and Hope was held at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in St Johns Wood, sponsored by the Three Faiths Forum, the Christian Churches in St Johns Wood, the Central London Mosque and the Liberal Jewish Synagogue.

On the other side, hate crimes motivated by religion did increase. The first recorded crime was an attack on a Sikh gurdwara in Erith, Kent. A meeting of leading Muslim

scholars on 15 July at the Regent's Park Islamic Cultural Centre, London, continued in spite of a hostile demonstration of about 300 white men with Union Jacks and National Front slogans. On 2 August Metropolitan Police figures showed there were 269 religious hate crimes in the three weeks following 7 July compared to 40 in the same period in 2004. A Guardian/ICM poll found that 63% of Muslims had considered whether they wanted to remain in Britain after the attacks. (www.icmresearch.co.uk).

In this polarized context, serious questions are being raised about the nature of Islam, the link between all religion and violence, multi-culturalism and the curbing of extremism. Is multi-culturalism dead, as some newspaper columnists have argued? Should there be a move towards a French model of assimilation? (A question now somewhat discredited by events in France). Should the government be able to close down places of worship where 'extremism' is preached, so penalizing all worshippers? Should it prohibit the activities of organizations such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, making dialogue within Islam more difficult?

Christians involved in building good inter faith relations cannot push these questions under the carpet. I hope they will be openly discussed in the months to come. As we do so, may we bear the following points in mind - in addition to John Parry's thoughts elsewhere in this bulletin:

- Many British Muslims feel a sense of shame, of being overwhelmed, that the atrocities in London were the work of Muslims. Some, such as Shahid Malik, MP for Dewsbury, have openly urged Muslims to

confront those who speak extremism. Christians can stand alongside Muslims as they explore ways forward.

- Religious texts and traditions are not innocent when it comes to conflict and violence. Selective quoting, whether from the Qur'an, the Bible or other texts, can justify violence. The use of religious texts to justify violence calls for a theological response. One way, therefore, in which Muslims are attempting to engage with extremist views is through theology (see for instance, 'Scholars hit back at 'evil' bombers', *The Guardian* 29.07.05). If some Muslim groups are pushed underground, this internal dialogue may be more difficult.

Madeleine Bunting, in *The Tablet* on 30 July 2005, wrote, 'But if there is to be any hope of rebuilding the trust of the Muslim community, we are going to have to understand it much, much better. For our own safety, we have to be able to distinguish between different types of Islam.' We need this, not only to build trust with the Muslim community but also to counter material circulating among Christians designed to stir up fear that willingness to use violence is mainstream within British Muslims. It is the responsibility of us all to build up our knowledge of Islam in Britain whether through friendship, dialogue, joint action or academic study.

Elizabeth J Harris

*Secretary for Inter Faith,
The Methodist Church and
Guest Editor for Inter Faith Exchange*

Anti-Semitism is Back Again

Reflections by Revd Ray Trudgian, Adviser on Jewish-Christian Relations for the Methodist Church

'Anti-Semitism did not die: it is back again. The people are different, but it remains the same cancer of the human soul.' Strong words indeed from the Chief Rabbi on VE Day 2005 as he addressed 1000 people gathered to mark the 60th Anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps. The Reform movement speaker, Rabbi Steven Katz, spoke of his own recent experience as he declared, 'Anti-Semitism today knows no boundaries. It is directed against the old and the young, religious and secular, synagogue and cemetery'.

Their statements are backed up by recent reports of a dramatic surge of violent anti-Semitism, the worse since the Second World War, with France (96 major violent personal attacks), Britain (84) and Canada (52) at the top of the notorious league. Details are contained in the annual report of the Tel Aviv Universities Institute for the study of Anti-Semitism and Racism. It noted that the emphasis had shifted from large-scale acts of violence organized by groups that intended to hurt as many Jews as possible, to attacks on individual Jews by persons acting spontaneously. It states, 'Attacks on persons identified as Jews on the streets and in the schools have become the salient characteristic of anti-Semitic activity being more numerous and more blatant than the vandalism of Jewish property'.

There would appear to be two points of view concerning the sharp increase. The British figures were published by the Community Security Trust, which recorded 532 overall incidents. Their spokesman feels there is a strong link with the events in the Middle East. I had the same reaction when I wrote to a national Church newspaper detailing anti-Semitic attacks and inviting Christians to extend the hand of friendship to Jews. This point of view seems to hold all Jews responsible for the acts of the Israeli Government with little appreciation of the fact that the British Jewish community has been at the forefront of the campaign to demand a two state solution or that many Jewish charities tirelessly promote dialogue and coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians.

The spokesman for the wider Tel Aviv report, however, declares that the basic rise in attacks is now understood to be 'more European than Middle Eastern'. Even if the conflict in the Middle East is resolved, anti-Semitism will not vanish, he declares. This bears out the statement of the Chief Rabbi that the old medieval anti-Semitism has not died out.

The ground of this anti-Semitism was laid in the church from the time of St Chrysostom to Martin Luther and still lingers Sunday by Sunday in the preaching of sermons. In my own work running seminars on Jewish /Christian understanding for clergy and lay preachers, I am astonished by the inherent anti-Semitism expressed. The late Pope John Paul II declared anti-Semitism, 'as a sin against God and man' and symbolically declared his own desire for reconciliation by his visits to a synagogue in Rome, Auschwitz and the Western Wall in Jerusalem. It is a sign of hope that Pope Benedict XVI stated in his inaugural address 'I greet you my brothers of the Jewish people to whom we are joined by a great spiritual heritage, one rooted in God's irrevocable promises.' It is to be hoped this will help to bring love and understanding to end 'the longest hatred'.

Polin 2004

Polin 2004: a journey into the human heart by Sarah Hall

For twelve days in the summer of 2004 I went to Poland (in Polish, Polin) with a dozen others: some Christians at the beginning of ordained ministry in different denominations; others expert in Christian-Jewish relationships; one of us Jewish. We went to look for the Jewish communities which, before World War II, flourished in Poland. What we found were traces of a time long gone. In previous centuries Poland had been relatively welcoming to Jewish immigrants, compared with, for example, Spain, where in 1492 all the Jewish population had been expelled or forced to convert to Christianity. The Polish King Kazimir had allowed them full citizenship. In one region of Poland, called Galicia, some towns even had a Jewish majority. But all that changed when the Germans invaded Poland at the beginning of the Second World War. They dug up Jewish cemeteries and paved the roads with gravestones, as if to obliterate even their history.

They used the synagogues where Jews had worshipped as storehouses or destroyed them. And the Jews themselves – six million in all – they sent to work camps to die slowly of starvation, disease, overwork and vivisection, or to gas chambers to die quickly of cyanide poisoning.

We saw the results of this attempt to destroy a whole people, culminating in a painful visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau where a railway line transported Jewish women, men and children in overcrowded cattle trucks from all over Europe to the crematoria where they would meet their deaths by cyanide poisoning – if a guard didn't shoot them on whim. I found the Nazi combination of fanatical planning and illogical destruction very hard to get my mind around. How could human beings do such things? The question was personal: one of my grandmothers was German, though she came to England in the middle of the war. But it was not only the Germans. One of the scandals of recent Polish history is the story of the village whose inhabitants, when the Germans came, rounded up and killed all their Jewish neighbours before being ordered to do so. And the Christian church must take its share of the blame, through readings of the Gospels and sermons accusing the whole Jewish people of killing Jesus. Today in Catholic Poland there is still a great fear of Jewish influence, though hardly any Jews now live there. Such unreasoning prejudice reminded us of the fear in Britain of immigrants from other cultures, though they are such a small minority in our population. And both the terrible slaughter of Jews and continuing Polish anti-Semitism helped me to understand – if not condone – current actions of the state of Israel intended to preserve its identity and security.

This is not the whole story: in Poland, Auschwitz is remembered as a site where many Poles were murdered, as indeed it was at the start of the war. But like destructiveness and victimhood, solidarity and hope are also part of human nature. Some Poles – the 'righteous Gentiles' such as Oskar Schindler – took extraordinary risks in the war to save Jews. Today, Catholic Poles are restoring the cemeteries, renovating the synagogues and welcoming Jews from elsewhere on pilgrimage; and middle-aged Polish Jews, assimilated into Christian society as children for their own safety, are beginning to explore their own religious and cultural roots. I went to Poland to find out about a particular community's history. What I discovered was the coexistence, deep in humanity, of both evil and good.

Book Reviews

Meeting Buddhists

Edited by Elizabeth Harris and Ramona Kauth
Published by Christians Aware
2 Saxby Street, LEICESTER, LE2 0ND
ISBN 1 877372 23 X £11.50

Meeting Buddhists is the fourth book in a series produced by Christians Aware to help people, mainly Christians, to meet people of other faiths and to understand something of their religion. Meeting Buddhists covers a whole series of topics including something of Buddhist history, doctrine and practice. The chapters are written by Buddhists who give an insight into the concepts from their own particular perspective. This quickly makes the reader aware of the complexity and contradictions that are to be found in any religion. While at any moment it is possible to say what this believer thinks about this particular topic it is hard to find a coherent pattern which will give an insight into Buddhism as a religion. Perhaps this is no bad thing as it is all too easy to generalise when it comes to religion and as the introduction states 'Generalisations about faiths are rarely accurate and never helpful'. Thus the reader is introduced to the many schools of Buddhism and is offered a variety of perspectives which often seem contradictory. Some articles are quite dense while others are of a much lighter note. It was with some relief that I was able to turn from the chapters on The History of Buddhism by Peter Harvey and The Heart of the Dhamma by the Most Venerable Dr Vajiragnana to the ones on Dharma and Kingfishers by David Brandon and Jim Pym's on Pure Land Buddhism. Of particular interest to me was the article by Shenpen Hookam which pointed out the differences in approach between eastern and western Buddhists and the effect westerners are having on the development of Buddhism. Perhaps the articles I appreciated most were the ones where the authors wrote about their own experience and I found myself engaging with them and reflecting on my own experience. In so far as the purpose of the book is to encourage such dialogue and reflection it has been successful and a good preparation for real life encounters with Buddhists. It is a good resource which will be useful for Christians wanting to know something of the background of the Buddhists they meet and their particular perspective on Buddhist concepts. For the reader, however, who knows nothing or little about Buddhism the differences and complexities may be a little overwhelming. For these readers a simple map or guide to the basics

of Buddhism at the beginning might have provided a context into which new information and ideas could be fitted. That having been said, however, Meeting Buddhists is a very useful resource and will be of great benefit to all engaged in inter faith encounters.

Sister Isabel Smyth
Churches Agency for Inter Faith Relations in Scotland (CAIRS)

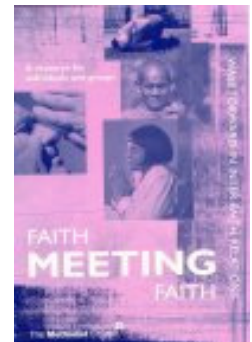
Faith Meeting Faith

Prepared by the Methodist Church in Britain
A resource for individuals and groups
Methodist Publishing House
ISBN 1 85852 266 8 £8.99

This is a book exploring most of the questions that Christian people in the UK are likely to ask about encountering people of other faiths. Very helpfully it unpacks each of these thirty questions in four ways, giving about two pages to each question.

It explains why the question is important. It provides some of the brief answers that can be heard whenever inter-faith relations are discussed. There is a longer piece of explanation usually with bible references, and finally some suggestions of ways to take the question forward.

Colin Chapman has said that churches usually emphasise the great Commission to make disciples, or the great Commandment to love our neighbour, but rarely both. This Christian resource book is rooted in both. I felt very comfortable with it and wholeheartedly commend it to all Christians.



I would have liked something more about the secularism all faiths encounter in the UK, and the way faith communities can support each other in facing this. I would also have liked some statistics on faith from the 2001 census, perhaps as an appendix. And another useful appendix would be a list of helpful biblical references which have inter-faith resonance, (the woman at the well, Peter and Cornelius and so on.)

But this is an excellent resource book for Christians interested in inter-faith relations. It is the best that I have seen. It deserves wide circulation, and not just among Methodists.

Rev Dale Barton
Inter Faith Adviser for Churches Together in Lancaster

Presence and Engagement: the churches' task in a multi-faith society

This is the report of an initiative that has taken almost four years to come to fruition. It focuses on the churches' task in areas where 10% of the population are from faiths other than Christian. Six regional steering groups (East Midlands, Lancashire, Greater London, West Yorkshire, Manchester, Birmingham) worked with a national steering group to gather and process data from the 2001 national census, regional consultations and a questionnaire sent to 563 parishes. Numerous stories of encounter came to light through the initiative, and also a mass of statistics and perceptions about such things as finance, use of church buildings, ecumenical cooperation, and people's hopes and anxieties about the future of the church. The report comments on the context of inter faith engagement moving from a specialism to the mainstream of British society, considers issues such as conversion and critiques the language of 'faith'. At the end of the report, six opportunities are listed, which include: to encourage reflection on the theological and scriptural foundation of the Church's engagement in multi faith areas; to enable local churches in multi Faith areas to be connected more effectively across diocesan and other boundaries. The Church of England General Synod recommended that the work become the basis of a new programme of work alongside ecumenical partners and this is now being taken forward.

The process has recommended the setting up of at least two regional inter faith education centres, one of which is the new St Philip's Centre in Leicester, the other is St Katharine's, in East London. Ecumenical co-operation has been encouraged throughout.

The report can be purchased or downloaded from the website of the Church of England.

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/interfaith/presence.pdf>

Dialogue Today and Tomorrow: Forty Years of Nostra Aetate

October 2005 marked the 40th Anniversary of Nostra Aetate. To celebrate this event a two day Conference, at two venues, was organized jointly by Heythrop College and two committees of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales: the Committee for Other Faiths and the Committee for Catholic Jewish Relations.

The first day had a scholarly emphasis and was held at Heythrop College, London University. The speakers were Archbishop Kevin Macdonald, Tom Stransky CSP, David Neuhaus SJ, Christian Troll SJ and Jacques Scheuer SJ. The second day focused on interreligious dialogue in the UK and was held at Westminster Cathedral Hall.

The conference assisted in raising the profile of interreligious dialogue and gave encouragement and support to all those, both clergy and lay people, with an involvement/interest in this area.

For further information contact Ann Noonan, the Secretary, Committee for Other Faiths, Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, 39 Eccleston Square, Victoria, London SW1V 1BX; akinyodeva@cbcew.org.uk

News from Cumbria

Meet Your Neighbour

For the past 3 years Churches Together in Cumbria has worked together with the Inter Faith Officer of Churches Together in Lancashire to take groups of Cumbrian Christians to Lancashire by coach to visit communities and places of worship of other faiths. This is particularly important in Cumbria where the 2001 census showed only 0.58% of the population to be of a religion other than Christian and where there is therefore considerable ignorance, and sometimes suspicion, of other faiths and faith communities.

In Preston we have visited the Gujerat Hindu Centre (South Meadows Lane), where the President Mr Ishwer Tailor gave a very interesting talk about the development of the centre and mandir and about the Hindu faith and we were able to look round and to witness worship there, and at the Clarendon Street mosque, where we again had a very interesting talk from and dialogue with the imam.

In Blackburn we were hosted at a local mosque by Ms Anjum Anwar of Lancashire Council of Mosques, who gave a very interesting and frank talk and answered questions, and we were welcomed to the gurdwara by Mr Joginder Bhamra where we learnt about the Sikh religion and the development of the gurdwara, and witnessed worship. Next year we hope to arrange a visit to the Jewish Museum and to a worshipping Jewish community in Manchester.

This year we were the joint hosts with the United Religions Initiative when a group of Hindu guests, including a number of families, from Lancashire visited the western Lake District. The Hindu group was brought together by Mr Ishwer Tailor of the Gujerat Hindu Centre in Preston. The visit included a short talk about Christian faith and practice from the vicar of the local parish church, as well as enjoying the local tourist attractions.

'Talking with our neighbours of other faiths' a discussion paper has been produced and distributed by The Social Responsibility Forum of Churches Together in Cumbria to all the churches in Cumbria in order to help them to overcome fear and misunderstanding of those from other faith backgrounds and to build links with people of other faiths. A copy of this discussion paper can be found at <http://www.churchestogethercumbria.co.uk>

Helen Boothroyd
Social Responsibility Administrator
Churches Together in Cumbria

Helen Boothroyd represents Churches Together in Cumbria on the steering group, working together to set up a North West Forum of Faiths to be a voice for the faith community in public policy in the region - see www.faithnorthwest.org.uk

News from Bath

The Mayor of Bath's Multi Faith Gathering was held on Sunday 13 February 2005. The Guest Speaker was The Hon. Barnabus Leith, Secretary of the Baha'i National Spiritual Assembly of the UK, who spoke to the theme of 'Without Prejudice'. The current Mayor, Cllr Peter Metcalfe, will host the next Multi-faith gathering on Sunday 5th February 2006, from 3-6pm, in The Guildhall, Bath. The theme will be 'A City of Unsung Heroes'. There will be contributions from the major faith communities: Jewish, Christian, Baha'i, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu (Sai Baba) and Buddhist, with exhibitions and presentations plus an opportunity to meet others from different faiths while refreshments are served.

John James
Bath Interfaith Group

G8 Vigil

The critical condition of the world's poorest countries was well publicised before the G8 summit meeting in early July. People came to Scotland in their thousands to show their solidarity with the most marginalized of our brothers and sisters round the world, pressing hard for change. The worldwide concerts added a further dimension to what must have been the largest demonstration ever in support of the value of human life wherever it is lived. Before the meeting we received information about steps to end debt in the poorest countries: it was not enough, we wanted more.

A more private way of bringing pressure took place at the shrine of Our Lady of Mt Grace, on the edge of the North Yorkshire Moors overlooking the Vale of York. For six hundred years, this shrine, founded by the Carthusian monks of the Priory below, has been a quiet centre for pilgrims. Its celtic simplicity gives it a special feel, and makes it a holy place, the ideal spot for prayer.

The Prior of the Monastery of Our Lady of Mt Grace, Father Terence Richardson, with the support of local Church leaders, proposed a three day vigil of prayer, starting with Morning Prayer at 9.00am and ending with Compline (Night Prayer) at 9.00pm, during the G8 meeting. It was to be advertised locally, and all men and women of faith were invited. In support of this initiative Churches Together contributed enough money to

cover the expense of a marquee, large enough to provide for varied events. The weather was inconsistent: a wet first day kept the prudent indoors, but a little sun on the second and third days encouraged many to come. By the end several hundreds had made the walk up to the shrine. There they found a welcome, a cup of tea and an opportunity to pray alone or with others.

There were groups from parishes and schools, representing different denominations. There were representatives from other faiths. Some came with their own prayers. Some just prayed in silence. Some had told us they were coming and were going to bring their own refreshments. Our regular visitors, of course, were fully supportive and there were many who had never been before. The vigil achieved its aim of bringing people of different faith traditions to pray together, together they witnessed to the power of prayer in changing minds.

We were particularly glad that one of the Imams from Middlesbrough came to join us one day. We were no less glad to see the Anglican Bishop of Whitby and the Catholic Bishop of Middlesbrough. The Methodist District Chairmen were meeting in Conference that week, and so could only be with us in spirit. Nevertheless there were many clergy, of all denominations, as well as hundreds of lay people.

Many said that prayer in this holy place reminded them of an important teaching: our world is under the loving hand of God and each person alive in it lives in the eye of God. In that prayerful atmosphere we were able to talk about our differences, exchange ideas and learn a little bit more about each other. CAFOD provided information booklets to inform our discussions about the G8 meeting. They helped to keep our minds focused on prayer. Candles were lit. Many spent long hours praying on their own in one of the chapels.

What did it achieve ? The fact of the continuous prayer for three days was impressive, a different approach to these intractable problems. In the light of faith we know our human problems can only be solved within the will of our loving God, whose being is to love, and each of us is part of that love.

We estimate that well over 500 people came. The Visitors Book at the Chapel was signed by many and there were many notes of appreciation. As the last departed on the Friday evening, we reflected that it had all been very worth while. We hope those who came will continue their prayer for this cause and having found their way to the Lady Chapel will continue to make pilgrimages to it.

The door is always open.

Abbot Timothy Wright

Operating principles relating to other faith communities: A Statement compiled by Churches Together in England

Churches Together in England (CTE) endorses four principles of inter faith dialogue (see note 1 below)

- Dialogue begins when people meet each other
- Dialogue depends on mutual understanding and trust
- Dialogue makes it possible to share in service to the community
- Dialogue becomes a medium for authentic witness.

Therefore CTE seeks to encourage Christians –

- to work for understanding between people of faith
- to learn about the beliefs and practices of different religions
- to be equipped to talk about their own faith.

Because Christians believe that they are called to tell others about their faith, CTE urges its members to evangelise sensitively in a multi-faith world, and encourages the provision of resources to enable this in neighbourhoods where there are people of different faith communities.

Christian prayer and worship is directed to God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. In welcoming representative figures of other faith communities, CTE regards it as important that

- the integrity of the whole service as an act of Christian worship is preserved;
- the Christian content of the service is not deliberately minimised or downplayed;
- no elements hostile or contrary to Christian faith are included;
- care is taken to ensure that those of other faith communities are not expected to behave in ways which are incompatible with, or inappropriate to, their own faith.

(see note 2 below)

As a corporate organisation, CTE is open to working with and alongside members of other faith communities when this is appropriate, The *Millennium Act of Reflection and Commitment* by various faith leaders expresses the principles on which the staff of CTE operate:

*We commit ourselves
to work together,
with people of many faiths,
for the common good,
uniting to build a better society,
grounded in values and ideals we share:*

*community,
personal integrity,
a sense of right and wrong,
learning, wisdom and love of truth,*

*care and compassion,
justice and peace,
respect for one another,
for the earth and its creatures.*

Churches Together in England is represented on the Churches Commission on Inter Faith Relations (CCIFR) and on its Executive Committee, and works with its Secretary. CTE also works closely with Inter Faith specialists and practitioners in its member churches, and in the county and intermediate bodies, and with the Inter Faith Network.

The above statement of principles applies to how CTE operates as an organisation, and is not a full account of the variety of views held within CTE's 23 Member Churches and denominations.

1. This section is based upon the Principles offered by the Churches Commission on Inter Faith Relations.

2. This section is based upon *Working Together – Co-operation between Government and faith Communities* – February 2004

March 2005

Geoffrey Parrinder (1910-2005)

An appreciation by Revd Dr Marcus Braybrooke

(with thanks to the World Congress of Faiths for allowing *Inter Faith Exchange* to use this text)

It was on my first visit to Younghusband House then the headquarters of the World Congress of Faiths (WCF) that I met Geoffrey Parrinder. His subject was the relevance of Indian religions to issues raised by John Robinson's controversial book 'Honest to God'. Soon, Professor Parrinder agreed to supervise my post-graduate studies.

Geoffrey was born in 1910 and trained for the Methodist ministry at Richmond College, where even in the thirties there were lectures on the world religions. In 1932, the College received an urgent appeal for missionaries to work in the Methodist church in the, then, French colony of Dahomey. After a year at the University of Montpellier to improve his French, Geoffrey set out for Africa, teaching at seminaries in Dahomey and the Ivory Coast and then lecturing at the University College of Ibadan (1949-1958). In his book 'In the Belly of the Snake', Geoffrey vividly describes his life during the time in Dahomey. Because of the rule that Methodist ministers could not marry for seven years from their acceptance for training, Geoffrey had to set out alone and was only allowed to marry Mary, who was to share so fully in his ministry, in 1936. During his time in Africa, Geoffrey studied for several higher degrees and his first of many books, 'West African Religion', was published in 1949. Before they finally left Africa, he and Mary and their son Stephen, paid a last visit to the area. He was told the rumour went around that 'the old lion is back'.

In 1958 he returned to Britain to teach at King's College, London, where he became Professor of the Comparative Study of Religions. His books, written with great clarity and wide knowledge, reached a far larger audience and Geoffrey was active in societies for the study of religions and inter faith understanding. For many years, he was President of the London Society of Jews and Christians. He was a Vice-President of the World Congress of Faiths and made a major contribution to the WCF booklet, 'Interfaith Worship'.

In his lecture 'Light from the East', Geoffrey expressed surprise that in the debate about 'Honest to God', there was no reference to any other religion, although most had faced the problem of religious mythology. 'The meeting of religions', he said, 'is new but is now an unavoidable fact.' To look at contemporary problems in the light of world religions, 'may help toward a realisation of the need to co-operate, to learn from each other, in charity and humility, and to be fellow-seekers after truth.'

Geoffrey Parrinder, by his teaching, writing and his life was true to what he preached.

A Personal Reflection on the London Bombings

In recent days one question has troubled me considerably. What motivated a group of young Muslims born in this country to commit such horrendous actions? I have worked with Muslims throughout my ministry both in Bangladesh and in the U.K. and am utterly convinced that the vast majority are absolutely appalled by what has happened. There is no justification in Islamic law. Like our own scriptures there are some pretty ghastly passages in the Qur'an that apparently justify such actions in the minds of those who read scripture literally, but as is so often the case, the context is paramount and needs to be carefully considered.

Who knows what was going through the minds of the bombers? They are dead. We shall never know.

This paper does not seek to explore the psychological issues, but rather the political and social concerns. In effect, what distresses and offends Muslims in the West.

The answers are many. I do not necessarily agree with them, though in many cases I see their point. I write as I have been informed during conversations with Muslim colleagues and I wish to stress I am in no way attempting to act as an apologist for Islam. Many of the issues at the heart of the matter are to do with American foreign policy, but seemingly unconditional support renders this country as a target. Charles Kennedy may have been accused of being naïve by No.10 when he suggested that our engagement in Iraq has to be taken into account. What a pity No.10 doesn't listen to some of its advisers.

So to the issue: Why do so many Muslims loathe the West?

- Neo-colonialism. The Western way of life seems to have become the norm for so many people. Western eating and drinking habits, music, language and art-forms have dominated, thus undermining traditional cultures.
- Increasing secularism. Islam views the secular world with suspicion. To the Muslim it represents a falling away from God's grace and a rejection of the will of God.
- Immodesty of lifestyle and dress is seen to be in complete contrast to the requirements of Muslim norms. It is blatantly paraded through satellite television.
- America was seen to withdraw support suddenly from Afghanistan after the collapse of Soviet power. The country had been devastated during the struggle against the Soviets and, although America was prepared to fight 'to the last Afghan' she was not prepared to aid in the rebuilding of the country. Few acknowledged the part Afghans played in the downfall of Communism. Whilst that country may seem very distant from the U.K. we have to remember that it is part of the Muslim heartland.
- The West was perceived as offering support only when it was in her own interests, cynically playing games with the lives of ordinary people and protecting only her own interests in the world.
- Bush reneged on the Kyoto agreement and tore up the anti-ballistic missile treaty.
- America refused to ratify moves to set up a permanent International Court of Justice. The present meeting of the Court of Justice in The Hague is a temporary matter. Israel, Libya and the USA are the three countries which refuse to establish a permanent court.

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A Personal Reflection on the London Bombings

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- The West speaks of democracy and the value of democratic methodology, yet is supportive of some of the most corrupt regimes such as the ruling family of Saudi Arabia where democracy is rejected. The fact that American troops, some of whom espouse an aggressive form of the Christian faith, are at the very focal point is, for Muslims, most disturbing.
- The present American administration apparently gives unconditional support to Israel which is seen by many in the Arab world to be neither legitimate nor to be in line with the democratic U.N. demands of resolutions 242 of 1967 and 338 of 1973.
- Whilst the hated Saddam Hussein may have been deposed, the nature of life in Iraq leaves so much to be desired. In the eyes of many Muslims so many people have lost their lives and for what benefit? Conflicting interests have divided the country and one-time powerful Sunni Muslims mourn the loss of power to Shias. What price freedom?

Now whilst the present American administration (note: *administration*) is often the lead player in these matters, British support does not go unnoticed. What of some of the more British issues?

- Within the United Kingdom itself one has to recognise the increasing and vociferous nature of the British National Party and the rising number of councillors representing them. Very little progress has been made in tackling the horror of the hatred of Islam in Britain since it was brought into sharp focus in the *Islamophobia* report first published in 1997. The insidious nature of anti-Muslim feeling continues to find expression.
- What is also significant is the way in which, as in other faith communities, traditional Muslim values of family life are being eroded. Parents do not know what their children are doing and have far less control over them than was previously the case. Note the surprise, genuine surprise, expressed by relatives of the suspected bombers from Leeds.
- Needless to say there will be many who will suggest that if the West is so awful why don't 'these people go home'? So, there's a further question. Where is home? Most young Asians speak both English and their parents' language, be it Urdu or Bengali, as in the case of most Asian Muslims. They are between two cultures – or do they straddle two cultures? Although British - born passport holders, they are cultural citizens of neither Pakistan nor the U.K. Well educated but disaffected because they are made to feel unwelcome in this country, they are also alienated from their family's country of origin. Thus they become targets of extremist leaders who claim they speak for authentic Islam, but whose expression of that faith is a far cry from submission to the will of God encouraged by the Prophet Muhammed.

As for us as Christians there has never been a more important time to stand alongside our Muslim neighbours. We can no longer say, 'There are none around here'. Pray that there will not be a backlash and that people will be able to recognise and acknowledge difference, learning to live with that tension. But are we also being challenged to counter some of those policies that have undermined confidence in Western leadership?

Rev Dr John Parry
Convenor of the United Reformed Church Inter Faith Relations Committee

Prayer and Presence

The following 'Guidelines on inviting members of Other Faiths to Celebrations in Catholic Churches' have recently been issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference Committee for Other Faiths.

Increasingly, the question of welcoming leaders and members of Other Faiths to occasions of special celebration in our Cathedrals and Churches is becoming an issue. Crossing the threshold of another Faith's place of worship is always a solemn moment and in putting together some guidelines for the benefit of those involved in arranging such events, the Committee has drawn on the experience of those long accustomed to welcoming Other Faith leaders.

It is worth mentioning that we are often not invited back because some of the Other Faiths do not have comparable occasions on which to return the compliment.

The following basic ground rules may seem obvious, but need stating:

1. A formal invitation is needed, to respect the dignity of the leaders being invited. It is advisable to accompany certain invitations with a telephone call.
2. They need to be informed as to the exact nature of the service they are to attend and the reason for their invitation.
3. They need to be allocated places of honour at or near the front of the Church, and to be accorded the same dignity as other civic guests if they process in or out.
4. They need to be reassured that they may wear their traditional dress, need not remove hats or shoes, and will not be obliged to take part in any singing, praying, standing or kneeling unless they desire to do so.
5. They should be met at the door and escorted to their designated places by a Catholic who is known to them.
6. They should be supplied with clear copies of the liturgy or other text and, if possible, should be seated with members of the host community, who know them can relate to them are involved in the local Interfaith scene and who can be a source of reassurance to them offering explanations where necessary
7. They should be greeted formally by the presiding clergy. This greeting to include an introduction to the congregation with an outline of their role in the locality, their involvement in the local religious/Interfaith/social scene.
8. They should be made welcome to any reception held after the event and reassured that suitable food and drink will be provided but that they need not feel obligated to partake of this unless they feel comfortable in so doing. It will be necessary to have two or more tables where vegetarians and vegans can find appropriate food; (awareness in regard to alcohol, pork, eggs and tobacco is called for).
9. Those invited may wish to bring their own food and drink. Often this can be an opportunity for Other Faiths guests to show their appreciation and such gestures of goodwill should be welcomed.
10. Christian hosts should be sensitive to the fact that Other Faith Communities place considerable emphasis on propriety and purity in matters of food and drink.

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Prayer and Presence *continued from page 13*

11. Because of the different types of celebrations, the time of year when the celebration is taking place, the needs and sensitivities of the Faith Communities involved, it is suggested that advice be sought by the organisers from an informed person, before each event.
12. It is advisable to research in advance which dates may be a source of difficulty for those to be invited. If the timing of the event cannot be altered, the invitation should be sent as planned but expressing acknowledgement of the difficulty involved, as a matter of courtesy.

Other areas to be aware of-

- a. Buddhist Monks may not be seated next to women. Buddhists are always accompanied. Seating needs to be arranged.
- b. Avoid inviting Muslims on a Friday (or Jews on a Saturday). It is noteworthy that Jewish leaders may come but stay in another room during the service.
- c. It is important to set aside a room where guests can dress in their robes, as appropriate.
- d. It is important to be sensitive to the presence of members of Other Faiths during the sermon and the speech at receptions and to emphasise what unites us.

On the question of *Communicatio in sacri* and common prayer, the formula which worked so well in Assisi is a useful one: we come together to pray, not to pray together. The presence of people of Other Faiths in no way invalidates the spiritual offering of the host community; rather, the experience of the several occasions when representatives from other Communities have been present has been one of welcome, acceptance and a deepening of friendship.

For further information contact Ann Noonan, the Secretary, Committee for Other Faiths, Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, 39 Eccleston Square, Victoria, London SW1V 1BX; akinyodeva@cbcew.org.uk

A Regional Ecumenical Conference for Inter Faith Advisers 8th October 2005, Emmaus House, Bristol

This conference was the first of its kind. Convened by the Churches' Commission for Inter Faith Relations, it brought together about 30 Christians from Southwest England and South Wales. Most had been appointed by their churches for inter faith work, for example as District or Diocesan Inter Faith Advisers, or Synod Advocates. The Conference was ably chaired by Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, Secretary for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry in the United Reformed Church. Ann Noonan, of the Catholic Bishop's Conference and acting Secretary of the Churches' Commission for Inter Faith Relations, opened the day with a reflective Bible Study.

The main inputs were on topics relevant to the region. Anthony Packer of the Cardiff Three Faiths Forum focussed on the Islamic presence in Wales and Southwest England. Taking inspiration from William Dalrymple's book on the Christian presence in the Middle East, *From the Holy Mountain*, he spoke of journeys, icons, relics and the history of Muslim-Christian relations. Moving to the present, he argued that Christians could learn from the Eastern tradition of Christianity in engaging with Muslims now. A dialogue of love and understanding was necessary. The gentleness within Islam must be affirmed, but the violence within some parts of it should not be ignored.

Kevin Tingay, Inter Faith Adviser in the Diocese of Bath and Wells, spoke about New Religious Movements in Southwest England, focussing on Modern or Neo-Paganism and New Age Religion. He sketched the three main traditions within the first: Wicca, Shamanism and Druidry. Moving to New Age, he stressed that many followers took their spirituality very seriously and were seeking a gentler religion than Christianity appeared to be. As with Neo-Paganism, some had bad memories of Christianity. The key for Christian engagement, he suggested, was affirmation of what was wholesome and good, combined with recognition of where Christians differed.

In the final session, participants shared what was going on in their region and what the important issues were. Many excellent examples of good practice were shared. Among the concerns raised were: how to counter apathy; the need to work at a structural level in the churches; finding alternatives to formal meetings; encouraging schools to see multi-cultural and multi-religious issues as relevant.

It was agreed that a future meeting would be valuable. The hope is that a self-sustaining regional network will emerge.

East Anglia will probably be the next region in which an ecumenical regional meeting will be held.

Resources compiled by Elizabeth J Harris

Celebrating Difference, Staying Faithful:

How to Live in a Multi Faith World

Andrew Wingate (Darton Longman and Todd, 2005), £12.95.

Andrew Wingate, former Principal of the United College of the Ascension, now Director of the new St Philip's Centre for Theology and Ministry in a Multi Faith Society in Leicester, draws on a lifetime's experience of inter faith encounter in this book. He has packed it with stories and case studies to give practical, theological and missiological guidance to Christians who want to stay faithful to Christianity yet also be positive about other faiths. Among the issues covered are: setting up inter faith encounters; controversial theological issues; inter faith prayer and worship; and religious education. Each section ends with questions for group discussion.

Relating to People of Other Faiths: Insights from the Bible

Israel Selvanayagam, published by Christava Sahitya Samithy, Tiruvalla and Board of Theological Text Book Programmes, 2004, p. 308, £9.00 (obtainable from Methodist Church House bookshop and the author)

This book, as the title suggests, seeks to explore the distinctiveness of the Bible as a resource for inter faith relations. The author freely admits that the Bible contains paradoxes, even contradictions, but argues that profound insights are present that can help Christians relate to other faiths as a servant community. Firstly, Dr Selvanayagam looks at the way Jesus approached scripture and identifies four principles that can be used by Christians now - rejection, revision, selection and reflection. Then, he moves to themes such as syncretism (Christianity has not been free of it), the people of God (texts such as Isaiah 19: 24-25 & Malachi 1:11) idol worship, interreligious marriage, and Jesus. There is a wealth of material here for individual or group use. Israel Selvanayagam is Principal of the United College of the Ascension in Birmingham.

Bearing the Word:

Prophecy in Biblical and Qur'ānic Perspective

Michael Ipgrave (Ed.), London: Church Publishing House, 2005, pp. 155, £12.99

This is an account of the third 'Building Bridges' seminar convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury and hosted by Georgetown University, Washington DC from 30 March to 1 April 2004. In a similar pattern to the accounts of the first two, also edited by Michael Ipgrave, it includes the texts of the presentations given, an account of the daily group discussions on scriptural texts and two final reflections on the whole process. The presentations addressed the following three themes: What is Dialogue? (Rowan Williams, Mustansir Mir, Miroslav Volf); What is Prophecy? (Wadad Kadi, Ellen F. Davis); Jesus and Muhammad (Mahmoud Ayoub, Daneil Madigan). The themes of the scriptural studies were: Called by God; Sent to humanity; The completion of prophecy. The final reflections are by Teresa Okure and Michael Ipgrave. This is an excellent addition to the series.

Resources

Axis of Peace: Christian Faith in Times of Violence and War

S Wesley Ariarajah, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2004, pp. 137, £8.40

Ariarajah leads his readers into this topic in a striking first chapter that begins with Jesus' words in Luke 23: 28: 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children' and ends with, 'For violence is a cancer. It eats from within'. From an anti-war position and with the Iraq war in mind, Ariarajah traces the history and content of the just war theory and probes the link between religion and violence. Bringing in his experience within the Office of Inter-Religious Relations at the World Council of Churches, he argues that in some parts of the world religion has emerged as the most effective tool for political and social mobilization and manipulation (p. 70). He faces questions few Christians dare to ask: Would a world without religious traditions, and the spiritual teachings they bring, be a less violent place? What do we do with the violence in our own scriptures, including the concept of a blood sacrifice?

In an accessible, almost conversational, way, Ariarajah raises questions central to Christian self-understanding and witness.

Other Resources from the World Council of Churches (WCC)

- **Religion, Power and Violence:** a video that shows 30 people from different religious traditions exploring issues around religion and violence. They came together for the 6th Willem Visser t'Hooft Consultation held at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey in June 2004. (Duration: 13 minutes)
- **Current Dialogue:** the journal of the World Council of Churches Interreligious Relations Office. This is an excellent journal that can be found online at:
www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/index-e.html
- From June 7-9 2005, the WCC hosted an interreligious Critical Moment Conference with some 130 people of different faiths. The report of the conference concluded that 'recasting interreligious dialogue as a practice of humility and hope offers a way of building greater trust' and continued, 'together may we seize this critical moment and help transform its perils into a pilgrimage of faith that will guide us to a more just, compassionate and peaceful future.' The contributions are now being edited for a book, which the WCC hopes will serve as a 'multiplier' for those who were not present. Some presentations and documents from the conference can be found at:
<http://www.oikoumene.org/interreligious.html>

Jewish Museum: The Museum of Jewish Life

Raymond Burton House, 129-131 Albert Street, London NW1 7NB (020 7284 1997) and the Jewish Museum, The Sternberg Centre, 80 East End Road, Finchley, London N3 2SY (020 8349 1143) www.jewishmuseum.org.uk

In two locations, the Jewish Museum is an excellent resource. In Camden Town, visitors can explore Jewish religious life and view a world-renowned collection of Jewish ceremonial art. The Finchley site focuses on the history of Jewish immigration and settlement in London. A plus point is the Museum's proactive attitude towards education for all ages. School Programmes and Group Visits are welcome by arrangement and there are also travelling exhibitions and creative workshops. (Your editor was impressed when she visited the Camden site!)

Events and Courses

Holocaust Memorial Day 2006

The theme of next year's Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD), 27 January 2006, is 'One Person Can Make A Difference'. The national ceremony will be held in Cardiff on Thursday 26 January.

LOCAL ACTIVITIES PACK

Dr Wendy Whitworth, is the HMD Local Activities Co-ordinator and is responsible for preparing the Local Activities Pack. The pack is available on the website and in hard copy. Contact: Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre, Laxton, Newark, Notts NG22 0PA, or the web address www.hmd.org.uk.

CHURCH SERVICE INFORMATION

Material for use in church services is being compiled with this year's theme in mind and will be accessible through the website of Churches' Together in Britain and Ireland: www.ctbi.org.uk

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY TRUST

The independent Holocaust Memorial Day Trust has now been established and has taken over responsibility for the Day from the Home Office. The chair is Stephen D. Smith and the Acting Chief Executive Nick Joseph. Contact information Tel; 0207 554 8615, email: nick.joseph@hmd.org.

Week of Prayer for World Peace (WPWP):

22nd to 29th October 2006

The WPWP began in 1974 as a Christian initiative. But it soon became an inter faith event. A leaflet giving prayer topics for each day and a selection of prayers from different faiths will be available from the London Inter Faith Centre. The inaugural gathering of prayer for peace will be hosted by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom, and will take place at the London Inter Faith Centre, 125 Salusbury Road, London NW6 at 3 p.m. on Sunday 22nd October 2006.

To order the leaflet, contact Mrs Lesley Daisley, WPWP Administrator
London Inter Faith Centre, 125 Salusbury Road, London NW6 6RG; Tel: 020 7604 3053.

M.Th. (Taught), M.Litt. (Taught) in Inter-Faith Studies (a notice from Professor Perry Schmidt-Leukel, University of Glasgow)

Like never before our age is marked by the encounter of different religious traditions on all levels: global, national, or local. This entails huge opportunities for dialogue, mutual learning, co-operation and even transformation, but also its own specific problems and challenges. If you wish to deepen your understanding of inter-faith relations and if you have a good degree in either theology, religious studies or a related discipline you might be interested in the new designated post-graduate degree in 'Inter-Faith-Studies'. The degree is offered from autumn 2005 onwards by The Centre for Inter-Faith Studies / University of Glasgow.

For more information please visit <http://www.religions.divinity.gla.ac.uk/Centre-Interfaith/index.htm>

Centre for the study of Jewish-Christian Relations in Cambridge

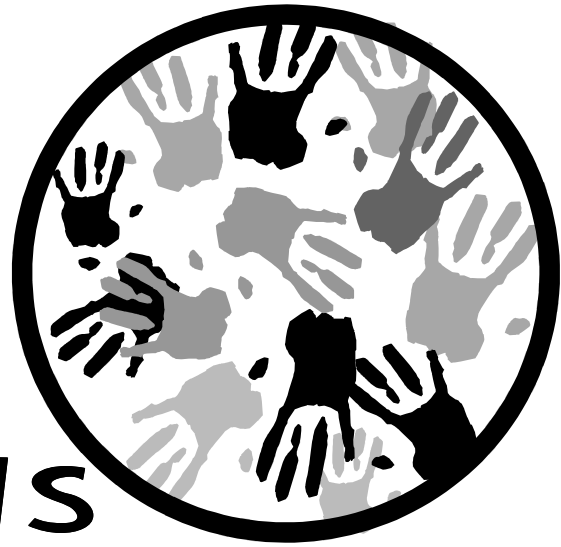
The centre invites applications for its postgraduate degrees: MA or Diploma in Jewish-Christian Relations in Cambridge or by distance learning (full or part time). To achieve the MA students complete 4 taught modules plus a dissertation of 15000 words. To achieve the Postgraduate Diploma, students complete 4 modules, or 2 modules for the Postgraduate Certificate. Modules include: Jewish-Christian Relations: their Foundations and Relevance to Contemporary Society; Jewish and Christian Responses to the Holocaust; Jews and Christians, Literature and Film; and Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation.

See: www.cjcr.cam.ac.uk Or write to: CJCR, Wesley House, Jesus Lane, Cambridge CB5 8BJ

CIPA

2006

Christian Inter Faith Practitioners Association



New Worlds New Tasks

Local and National **E**ngagement,
Dialogue and **A**ction

+Discourse+Witness+Friendship+
+Motivations+Endpoints+

23rd to 25th May 2006
Hebron Hall Christian Centre
Cross Common Road, Dinas Powys
Vale of Glamorgan, CF64 4YB



New Worlds New Tasks

CIPA

2006

Christian Inter Faith Practitioners Association
Annual Consultation

CIPA 2006 Booking Information available from

Katalina Tahaafe-Williams
(CIPA 2006)
United Reformed Church, Church House
86 Tavistock Place
LONDON
WC1H 9RT

Or email to: ktw@urc.org.uk

Cost: £120 or £110 if booked by 31st January 2006

Inter Faith Exchange

Inter Faith Exchange comes out occasionally. Thanks to a generous donation we are now able to supply further copies FREE. For further copies or for an email version please contact Judith Lampard.

We need your contribution and feedback to make this a genuine exchange.

If you have

- **news, which you think would be of interest to Christians involved in inter faith relations,**
- **notices of events**
- **resources**

please contact either

Elizabeth J Harris
Methodist Church House,
25 Marylebone Road, London, NW1 5TR

Judith Lampard
Churches Together In England
27 Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9HH
Tel: 020 7529 8143. E-mail: judith.lampard@cte.org.uk