

20th Anniversary Brochure

for Leicester Council of Faiths



LEICESTER COUNCIL OF FAITHS
working for trust and understanding between the faith communities



Souvenir Brochure 1986-2006



Message from Resham Singh Sandhu MBE, FRSA, BA (Chair)



This 20th Anniversary of the Leicester Council of Faiths allows us all to appreciate what is essentially a fairly recent invention: practical co-operation and dialogue between faith-communities. In the following pages you will be able to witness the sea-change which has come over our City of Leicester. We have moved away from old

hostilities, competitiveness and suspicions which have spoiled relations between the faith communities in the past. As communities of spiritual understanding we are learning to embrace mutual respect of one another and co-operation in service towards our city and its institutions. It is a change which has not only made Leicester a primary model for other British cities, but has also attracted interest in Europe and beyond. Members of the Council of Faiths have been invited to Germany, France, Belgium, and Denmark and the good name of Leicester is also known as far afield as Indonesia, India, Africa and the U.S.A, as a result of the enterprise of our members. There is much of which we can be justly pleased as we carry the message of good interfaith relations, as these have developed in Leicester, around the world.

It makes me both humble and proud to have had the honour of chairing such a body since 2000. I thank both my predecessors and those who have shared with me in recent years the task of helping to bring to maturity the achievements recorded in this brochure. There are many fine people who have shared their wisdom and skills in a common purpose. But in truth we are only just beginning. The tragic events of Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Gujarat, Iraq, of the 9/11 attacks on America and the London Underground bombing of 7/7 have made their impact even here, and we have had to address local repercussions. Most of the time, because we have the infrastructure to respond to national and international events, and in collaboration with the Bishop of Leicester's Religious Leaders' Group and the Police, any potential tensions that might have arisen have been dissipated.

I am very grateful for the interest and support shown by so many individuals and institutions in city and county. In today's world, the work of learning to understand one another's faiths must never cease. Let us hope that the work of the Leicester Council of Faiths over these last twenty years bears more and more fruit in the future, and that we all – people of faith and people of goodwill – can grow together in mutual respect and understanding for the benefit of the whole of our society.

I greet you in the Sikh traditional way – Sat Sri Akal (Whoever says it is blessed: God is Truth.)

Current Members of the Council

Patron: The Bishop of Leicester, Christian

Honorary Life Members:

S Faiyazuddin Ahmad, Muslim

Nathubhai Jagjivan, Hindu

Dr. Ataullah Siddiqui, Muslim

Thakarsibhai Morjaria, Hindu

Chair: Resham Singh Sandhu, Sikh

Vice Chair: Minou Cortazzi, Baha'i

Secretary: Dr Angela Jagger, Christian
(also a nominated member)

Assistant Secretary:

Revd Canon Dr Andrew Wingate, Christian

Treasurers: Revd Dr Alan Race,
(also a nominated member) Christian

Malcolm Veall (Welcome Centre), Christian

Representative Members

Janette MacDonald, Baha'i

Dr. Stephen Vickers, Baha'i:

Vacancy, Buddhist

Sr. Sustama Kim, Buddhist

David Mitchell, Christian

Fr. John Lally, Christian

Rory Samuel, (Black-led Churches) Christian

Revd Stuart Jennings, Christian

Ramanbhai Barber, Hindu

Rashmikant Joshi, Hindu

Ramesh Majithia, Hindu

Ramesh Mehta, Jain

Smita Shah, Jain

Rabbi Shmuel Pink, Jewish

Tony Nelson, Jewish

Dr Alex Keller, Jewish

Dilwar Hussain, Muslim

Manzoor Moghal, Muslim

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra, Muslim

Suleman Nagdi, Muslim

Abdulkarim Gheewala, Muslim

Sewa Singh, Sikh

Lukhvir Kaur, Sikh

Bhupinder Kaur, Sikh

Ramesh Mashru, Swaminarayan

Narendra Waghela, Swaminarayan

Nominated Members

Revd Dr. Prof. Richard Bonney

Mrs Cynthia Bunten

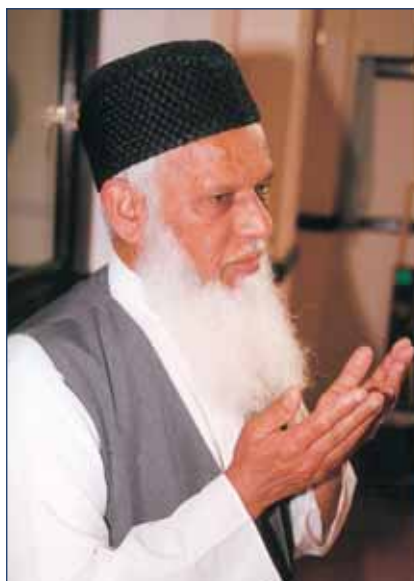
Councillor Manjula Sood

Elizabeth Wayne

Steve White

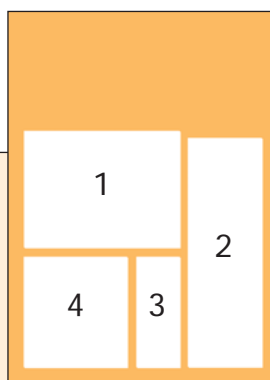
Marcus Solanki

M. Yaqub Khan



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Captions from front cover, clockwise. 1) Members and friends in the Lord Mayor's Parlour front: Mary Draycott (Lord Mayor), Resham Singh Sandhu (Chair), Minou Contazzi (Vice Chair); behind, left to right: T V Morjaria, David Jennings, Alan Race, Alex Keller, Rashmikanth Joshi, Manzoor Moghal, Duncan Cambell, Marcus Solanki, Andrew Wingate, Abdulkarim Gheewala, Mr Chohan, Mahesh Prasher, Roger Blackmore (Leader of the City Council). 2) Interfaith Banner from the Welcome Centre. 3) Volunter on Interfaith Gardening Work Camp. 4) Global Ethic Exhibition in the Shires.

Messages of Support



The Prime Minister

I send my warm congratulations to the Leicester Council of Faiths for 20 years of public service to the people of Leicester and Leicestershire.

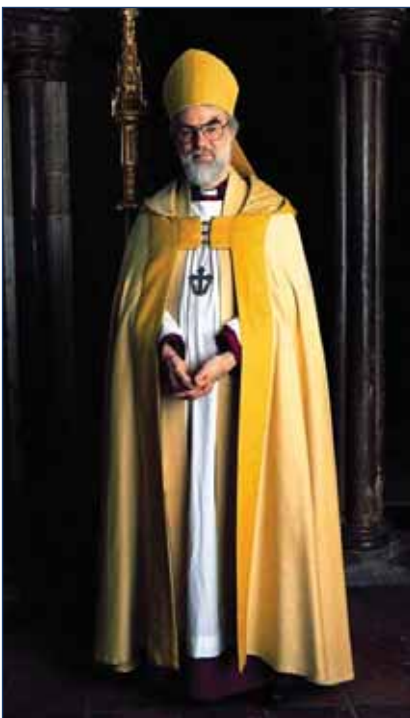


The work of building good relations between faith communities is vital if we are to promote a stable and cohesive society for all our citizens. With 20 years of experience, Leicester's example shows what can be achieved by people of faith and goodwill in the promotion of mutual understanding and respect

As the world grows closer together daily, the need to nurture common bonds and values, and better understanding, between cultures, ethnicities and religions cannot be underestimated. May the Leicester Council of Faiths continue to play its part in helping to shape a world where the values of trust, hope and reconciliation are central to this country's vision for the future.

Yours sincerely


Tony Blair



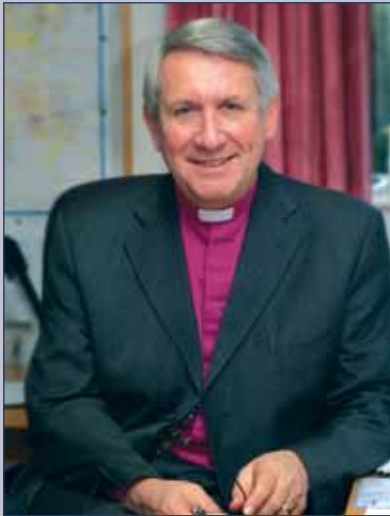
Archbishop of Canterbury

It is with great delight that I send my greetings to the Leicester Council of Faiths on the occasion of their 20th anniversary celebrations. In a world that seems to struggle to create spaces where people of commitment can learn to respect their differences and work together on common problems without suspicion or fear of one another, it is commendable that so much has already been achieved.

Over twenty years the Leicester Council of Faiths has been building trust and partnership between faith communities for the benefit not only of your own mutual learning but also in service of the wider community. I pray that your invaluable work may continue to grow and that the circle of influence you represent may widen so that we may build together a community of communities where real hope shapes the concrete possibilities for our shared future.

+ *Rowan Williams*: 

The Most Reverend Dr. Rowan Williams



Patron and Bishop of Leicester

As Patron of the Leicester Council of Faiths, it gives me great pleasure to commend its work to you. This brochure highlights the very important place of faith in our communities which is once again becoming recognised and valued at a local, regional and national level. People of faith are at the heart of the communities throughout our city and county, and we have found through our journeying together that when faith communities work together, then the whole of civil society is strengthened. I am grateful to all those who have worked hard over these past twenty years to build up the good relationships we now enjoy. I wish the Council and the faith communities it represents increased success in the future.

Tim Stevens



Director, Inter Faith Network for the UK

Since 1986 when the Leicester Council of Faiths came into being the interfaith scene in this country has changed significantly. At local level there are now around 200 local inter faith organisations spread out across the UK. But Leicester Council of Faiths remains one of the most prominent and has played an invaluable role in sharing its experience and expertise in recent years with new interfaith initiatives as these develop in other parts of the country. It has therefore made a contribution of considerable significance, not only locally but nationally as well, and I have great pleasure in sending the congratulations of the Inter Faith Network for the UK on this notable anniversary.

Brian Pearce



First Chair, Leicester Council of Faiths

It seems so long ago, and yet paradoxically but yesterday, that the Council of Faiths was founded. I find myself profoundly thankful to God for the opportunity to be in at the beginning to catch a vision for the possibilities of co-operation between faiths, and one which I was able to realise again as Bishop in Victoria in Australia. In this coming century the one great issue which people of all and every religious tradition and community must tackle is the relationship between the world faiths. So my hope and prayer for the Leicester Council of Faiths is that God will continue his blessings on you and your member communities, and that you will continue to serve the cause of that justice and peace which is the only true and lasting foundation of peoples and nations.

Bishop David Silk



The 20th Anniversary celebration of the Leicester Council of Faiths is a suitable marker to highlight the richness of the many faith communities in our city, which touches the lives of more than three-quarters of the population. I am proud of the initiative of my predecessor Janet Setchfield in convening the leaders of the faith communities, which led to the establishment of The Council of Faiths. It has born much fruit to enable people of faith to meet each other.

You have begun the process of developing trust and understanding so necessary in our contemporary climate, where inter religious conflicts in other parts of the world have the capacity to enflame people's passions and provoke violent responses. Thanks to the model of interfaith relationships which we are developing in our City; it is possible to offset potential crises and to build new relations in which the faiths are discovering how much they have in common.

I wish the Council every success in its future work.

The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Leicester, Mary Draycott



We are delighted to celebrate with you the 20th Anniversary of the Council of Faiths. You represent the religious diversity of Leicester in a special way, and contribute considerably to the good relations between the faiths and different ethnic groups in the city.

We are pleased with the work in which you have shared to enhance the social cohesion of the city and to forward understanding between the different faiths. The overcoming of religious and racial tensions would be that much more difficult without the existence of the LCoF.



We are especially pleased with the contributions of several of your members and associates towards the provision of faith-sensitive treatment of patients in the National Health Service, as well as the faith input into Medical Ethics. We are aware of the social capital which exists within the faith communities for the good of the city, county and country.

Our own work in improving community relations and serving the needs of individuals and minority groups in the city is helped by your evidently collaborative stance.

We wish you well in your future work.

Rt Hon Patricia Hewitt, Rt Hon Sir Peter Soulsby and Rt Hon Keith Vaz, MPs for Leicester



Leicestershire Constabulary has worked hard to build relationships with the different ethnic and faith communities in Leicester. We value their support given through the Leicester Council of Faiths and its allied body, the Bishop's Religious Leaders' Group. We assist at various public religious events involving street processions, which are invariably peaceful and enjoyable. The faith communities stand for good order and responsible attitudes, and we hope to continue working with them together. On behalf of the Leicestershire Constabulary, we wish you well on this 20th Anniversary.

Matt Baggott, Chief Constable



I am delighted to send my best wishes to the Leicester Council of Faiths on this 20th Anniversary.

Twenty years is a relatively short time, but the Council of Faiths has shown how necessary it is for the kaleidoscope of faiths in Leicester to have a point of reference, and an example to remind us all that no-one has a monopoly of faith. As Lord Lieutenant I have seen how the relationships established between the different faiths of our County and City are admired and envied by many. The desire to understand each other's faiths and live together in peace makes Leicestershire a special place.

Best wishes too for your future work.

Lady Gretton, Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire



On behalf of the University of Leicester, I congratulate the Council of Faiths on celebrating its 20th Anniversary. The University, through the Students' Union, makes provision for the various faith communities to meet, and supports the Chaplaincy in its service to people of different faiths. We have just established an *Institute of Community Cohesion* jointly with Warwick, Coventry and De Montfort Universities, which partly relies on the good relations between the faiths modelled by the LCoF and consults with several of your members. May you continue to play an important part in shaping the future direction of interfaith relations in the 21st century.

Professor Bob Burgess, Vice Chancellor of the University of Leicester



On behalf of De Montfort University, I congratulate the Council of Faiths on celebrating its 20th Anniversary. Our University helps the various faith communities to meet on its premises, and supports the Chaplaincy in its services to people of different faiths. With the help of Ted Cantle, we have just established an *Institute of Community Cohesion* jointly with the Universities of Warwick and Coventry and Leicester. We have been glad to have the advice of several of your members. I hope you will continue to enable and stimulate the shape of interfaith relations in the 21st century.

Philip Tasker, Vice Chancellor of De Montfort University



On behalf of University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust I am pleased to join you in the celebration of the founding of the Leicester Council of Faiths 20 years ago.

Every day we have over 2,500 in-patients at our hospitals, all of whom need not only expert clinical care, but also, together with their families and friends, the support and understanding which are given by the Chaplaincy teams. These teams reflect the religious diversity present in Leicester, as do the prayer rooms and chapels in the hospitals. We are grateful for the help which several of your members and associates have given us in dealing with religious sensitivities in the care of patients and their relatives, who often go through great stress and anxiety.

We wish you well in your future work.

Philip Hammersley, Chair of University Hospitals Leicester NHS Trust

The Changing Face of Faith in Leicester - since the 1970s *Paul Winstone*



Paul Winstone, Policy Officer in the Leicester City Council's Chief Executive's Office.

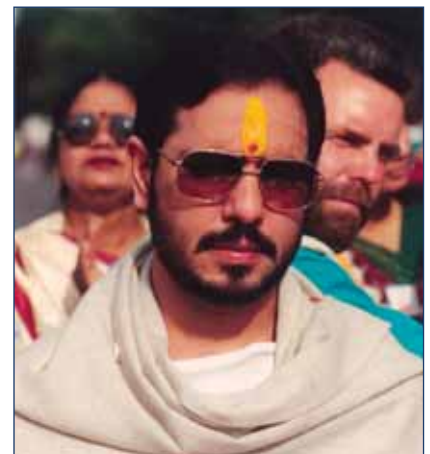
In the last thirty years we have seen in Leicester the re-emergence of the importance of the religious voice of conviction and the rise of "Faith Communities" as a powerful concept that is recognised by both local and national Government. It is hard for us now to estimate the dominant influence of secularism on the minds of policy makers in the 1970s.

Under the surface however things were changing. Between 1968 and 1975 the ethnic minority community in Leicester grew from 5% to 25% according to the Survey of Leicester, carried out in two volumes by Leicester City Council and other Authorities in 1982. Leicester inherited a commercial class from East Africa that brought their strong Hindu, Sikh and Muslim beliefs with them. A massive demand for places of worship was created as well as curiosity about the beliefs and festivals of relatively unknown religions in Britain. New words appeared that we are now so familiar with - "Eid", "Vaisakhi", "Diwali". The Race Relations industry at this time was summarised as "samosas, saris and steel bands", with no mention of faith at all. Academics spoke of "race" and "class" as the key terms. It was all so black and white!



The real change for policy makers began in the mid 1980s with the emerging view that faith communities could benefit regeneration in cities, as well as the growth of interest in Islam, clearly a religion and not an ethnic group. Issues such as the "greening" of places of worship, often unsuitable Victorian schools and factories, beautiful on the inside but drab on the outside, were enthusiastically embraced. Peace vigils were jointly held for South Africa and the former Yugoslavia, with both Serbian and Bosnian supporters listening to Hindu music on Spinney Hill Park.

In the 1980s, Diwali in particular became a huge event, supported by the City Council and many non Hindus. This classic triumph of Good over Evil resonated with many Christian people, with its candles lighting the dark. This led to the saying: "in Leicester Christmas begins in October," that is, with Diwali. City



Guru Oza with Head Teacher Steve White at Rushey Mead School.

Council support for Chanukah and the Eastern Christmas seemed to complete the acceptance by the city of a new multi faith year of rituals. It is no accident that Christian visibility on the streets at Easter and Christmas has also risen, along with vast processions for Hindu Gurus and Sikh events in the 1990s.

In this period the Local Authority has financially supported the Leicester Council of Faiths, working with it on a wide range of issues, including regeneration; with the Muslim Burial Council on funeral service delivery and with the Hindu community on a whole range of issues including cremation, water death rituals and park management. Over this period

the general public has become increasingly curious about non-Christian faiths. Programmes such Asaf Hussain's "Multicultural Mosaic" at Vaughan College have been hugely successful in introducing thousands to the physical experience of a Mosque, Synagogue, Gurdwara and Hindu Temple.

Through the Education Department's Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE), Multi Faith Curricula have taught a generation or two of our children to be aware of the basics of each others' religions, a knowledge that would have been impossible in my school childhood in the 1950s. LCoF member Elizabeth Wayne has been one of the main shapers of the RE curriculum for the Leicester city schools through the SACRE. Another creative personality in the world of education is Steve White, former Head of Rushey Mead School, who has made a significant contribution to the LCoF and other social cohesion initiatives in the city.

During the last thirty years the City Council has become increasingly aware of the value of partnership with Faith Communities. It adopted an initial policy on faith matters in the early 1990s which led to the creation of the post for a Faiths Policy Officer, first held by Angela Berryman and then in part by



myself. Many Departments have forged their own links with Faith Communities - exploring diet, language and culture - particularly in the treatment of older people and children. Women-only swimming was introduced in our Leisure Centres and attempts made to respect religious holy days, clothing imperatives and issues such as prayer rooms and dealing with anti-religious hate crime.

As a secular authority, Leicester City Council is aware of the views of secular humanist opinion and the debate over faith-based schools. This can lead to some difficulties that are not yet resolved. Overall however we

have learnt to work well in partnership with all faiths supporting a number of projects under our Community Cohesion Fund including a Inter Cultural Leadership School and support for interfaith dialogue. The Authority's relationship with faith communities is recognised by Government as one of the best in Britain. There is a balance here between the Secular Power and Spiritual Powers that has been facilitated, in no small way, by the Diocese of Leicester, by Bishops Tom and Tim, and by many individuals in the churches. Outstanding Councillors who are people of faith, such as Councillor Manjula Sood, have also played a part in this process. The small but vibrant Jewish Community has also played a disproportionate role in working for tolerance and making our city Holocaust Memorial events outstanding. The work of Professor Aubrey Newman on Holocaust Studies is outstanding and unmatched.

Over thirty years the faith communities have reached a level of sophistication in their relationships, such that their partnership with government in Leicester is not in doubt, even if new challenges cause tensions from time to time. Only one trend is clear, our religious and faith complexity will continue to deepen and demand study and dialogue. The future looks very exciting indeed. ■



A Short History of the Leicester Council of Faiths



Memories from the beginning

David Silk (first Chair)

In 1983 a letter arrived on my desk from the Archbishop of Canterbury. He was stumped by a letter from the puzzled father of a girl who had become involved in a Hindu religious group and was proposing to marry one of the members. Did I have any advice? I realised that, to my shame, although I had been Archdeacon of Leicester for the best part of three years, I had never really addressed the issue of interfaith relations.

Then Mrs Indira Gandhi was assassinated. There was a commemorative event at the De Montfort Hall, and all were invited. I consulted Father Michael Walls of Saint Saviour's Church and the Revd Martin Forward who was serving as a Methodist minister at Wesley Hall and was the national advisor on interfaith matters. Their advice was that a senior churchman should attend, and that he should take a significant body with him. A group of clergy was rounded up, a couple of nuns and a number of lay folk,

and we turned up in force without knowing what would happen.

For me the most moving moment was when two members of the Sikh community addressed the gathering, shared their distress, and were heard with gentle courtesy. I made a few stumbling remarks about how we had come to share the sorrow of the Hindu community, stood alongside them in their grief and perplexity and shared their struggle in the search for meaning and the desire for forgiveness and reconciliation.

It was clear to me that Leicester needed a simple instrument to serve as a forum for the faith-leaders to meet, to talk together as equals and to become friends. We should be able to pick up the 'phone and say, "Good Morning, David/Nathubhai/Minou, I have a problem: can you tell me...?" or "Can I come round?"

I explained this to Bishop Richard Rutt who pledged his full support. We were not exactly beginning from scratch because, before our time, others, including Canon Dick Wootton, had laid foundations of personal contact and trust. So it was with confidence that in 1986 I approached Janet Setchfield, at that time Lord Mayor and

Jewish by religion, who agreed to host an opening gathering and reception.

At this gathering it was decided to form a steering committee to launch a Council of Faiths. By November 1986 a formal constitution was approved and office bearers were elected. Leaders of the Christian, Hindu, Jain, Muslim and Sikh communities were present and it passed off well. So Janet and I concluded that a further meeting should be called – this time to be more than nice – we should begin to talk business.

And so the Council was born. Michael Walls threw himself into the work and we formed a committee. It was agreed that that neither syncretism nor proselytisation would be permitted. Instead, we began to learn about one another's faith traditions *from the inside* – not with the mind only but with the heart and soul. Religion for each of us is not just a shopping list of propositions, or even a code of behaviour. Rather, it is a pattern of living. I found that I could attend Friday prayers at Asfordby Street Mosque and sit quietly at the back, feel at home and at prayer. Gradually we found ourselves attending one another's celebrations and beginning to feel accepted.

Note: Leicester City's population (279,921) includes nearly one third ethnic minorities. 2001 Census: 36.04% of ethnicity originating outside the UK: 25.7% (72,033) from India; other Asian 2% (5,516); and 1.7% (4,610) of African/Caribbean origin. There is a large Somali community said to be around 15,000 for which official figures are yet to be released. These figures do not include communities of Chinese, Poles, Ukrainians, Serbians, Lithuanians, Vietnamese and other minorities as well as well over 5,000 overseas students resident in the city for two-thirds of the year. The 2001 census faith statistics for Leicester City are: Christianity 44.72% (125,187); Islam 11.03% (33,885); Hinduism 14.74 % (41,248); Sikhism 4.2% (11,796); Judaism 0.15% (417); Buddhism 0.23% (638); other 0.43% (1,179); no religion 17.42%(48,789); religion not stated 7.08%(19,782). All these figures are approximate and remain subject to change.

To respond to the spiritual needs of this city, there are 42 mosques, 6 Sikh Gurdwaras, 1 Buddhist Vihara (and one in the village of Narborough), 1 Orthodox and 1 Liberal and Progressive synagogue, 1 Jain temple, around 13 Hindu temples and a very large number of Christian churches of all denominations. There are 243 Places of Worship in the City listed in our booklet of that name.

A few moments stand out in my mind from those days. We had little contact with the Hebrew congregation, although there had been a civic service each year at the synagogue. And then Tony Nelson and I met at the Anne Frank Exhibition. His membership of the Hebrew congregation brought that community into the Council of Faiths.



Interior of Orthodox Synagogue

As the years went on we moved from friendship and shared ethical concerns to explore the implications of a shared witness. It is so good that the format of the commemoration which we worked for on Remembrance Sunday at the War Memorial has continued to be observed.

The City of Leicester rejoiced at the opening of the Jain Centre. My family was fortunate in being able to entertain the great Bishop Trevor Huddleston who attended as the representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The then Archbishop of York visited to speak at a dinner as part of that celebration.

And then I recall how we managed to draw people together as the city tried to handle the fallout from the publication of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*. Fr Michael Ipgrave did a superb job at the time when we feared the consequences of the Hindu-Muslim tension over the destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya. He was on the streets in a trice and we were the only major city

in the UK to be incident-free at that time. This was a precedent well set: that conflict elsewhere in the world should not be allowed to disturb friendly relations in Leicester.

Leicester and the Council of Faiths each owe a great debt to those founders who had a vision and worked hard to realise it: Ataullah Siddiqui, now Director of the Markfield Institute of Higher Education (part of the Islamic Foundation, formerly on London Road), Nathubhai Jagjivan of the Sri Sanatan Mandir, Nathubhai Shah of the Jain community, T V Morjaria of the Sri Jalaram Prarthna Mandal, Tony Nelson of the Jewish community, Faiyazuddin Ahmad of the Islamic Foundation, Minou Cortazzi of the Baha'is and many others, as well as the Revd Martin Forward, Fr. Michael Walls, and Fr. Michael Ipgrave.

The very early days

Cynthia Bunten

For many years before 1986 there was interfaith activity in the city. Perhaps we should start with the opening of the Leicester Overseas Centre in Blackfriars Hall in Wellington St. This came about because the Sikh Community had bought the Holy Cross School buildings in New Walk for use as a Gurdwara and it seemed sensible to offer the nearby Church Hall as a meeting place for all those communities that had no premises of their own. Opening every Saturday, it offered a place for discussion of difficulties and problems either religious or secular and provided facilities for table-tennis or five-a-side football for the younger members. We would keep a count of the number from other countries which reached a peak of 16 nationalities.

As time went on the discussion area became more and more necessary. I particularly remember an attempt to "make peace" between the Police

and Communities. We had invited our guests including some from the Black People's Liberation Party and the Police. All was proceeding well until the selected police speaker began with "In every community you will find its black sheep" and all hell broke loose. I think it was roughly 2.00 a.m. before we closed the doors. The Chair at that time was Yusef Choudary, a young Muslim who did a remarkable job. He eventually went on to become a city councillor.

In 1973 *the Know Your Neighbour Course* began and it was an immediate success. It was led by me, [Cynthia Bunten was then a youth worker in Highfields. She is a Roman Catholic Christian attending Holy Cross. I was one of the first members of the LCoF. The course was available to all community workers it was obvious that many of us were in desperate need for information and understanding. It was also the beginning of seeing the possibility for a much more detailed sharing of religious belief between the various faiths. This was not only coming from community workers but also from the police. It became quite scary to welcome such a mixed group to a mosque, temple or gurdwara. Who would cause upset and chaos by sitting with outstretched legs, unfortunately pointing to Mecca, or a policeman with a sense of humour sporting a Union Jack as a head covering, or a group with their backs to the altar or shrine?

I believe that Leicester would never have become such a peaceful city without the work and determination of Canon Dick Wootton who was always there for everyone and the Revd Derek Sawyer now in the West Indies who produced yearly concerts, often in the De Montfort Hall, with all communities giving their best with dance, music, or singing. The Revd Eric Lott, the Minister from Wesley Hall, was famous for providing the necessities of life, and the Revd David Morris for housing the homeless. They were indeed the pioneers of the past who blazed the trail. ■





Maujula Sood with her 'Woman of the Year' award.



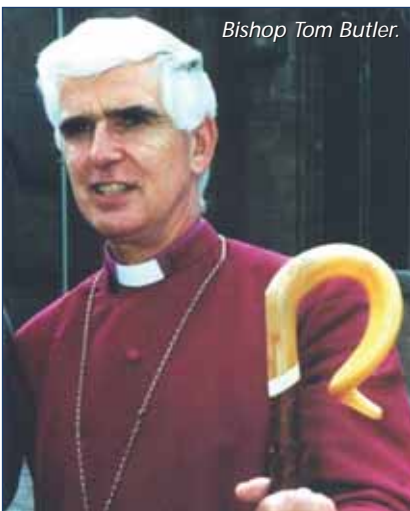
Elizabeth Wayne Head of R.E. Soar Valley School.



Angela Jagger teaches Religious Studies with the Open University.

A Selection of Events

The LCoF has heard a great many **speakers** at its meetings. A few stand out from the early days. Anne Owers, then associated with the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants and now Inspector of Prisons, spoke on 'Faith and Immigration'.



Bishop Tom Butler.

A particularly significant occasion organised by the Council was a Day of Grief and Prayer for Bosnia held on October 10 1993 in Spinney Hill Park. This was attended by many people from across the faiths and was addressed by Bishop Tom Butler of Leicester and Maulana M. Shahid Raza, Imam at the Central Mosque, who were representing the two faiths most intimately connected with the conflict in Bosnia. Silence was kept and flowers laid on a map of Bosnia.

A collection was made which went towards the City Council's Leicester Aid for Bosnia. 2,200 people signed a statement of concern addressed to the Foreign Secretary.

Each year since it began the LCoF has taken a lead in the organisation of Holocaust Memorial Day on or near 27th January. The first such day was marked with a splendid exhibition of pictures by local artist Harry Walton in the City Rooms, visited by over 500 people. Since then the observance has been marked by a variety of presentations.



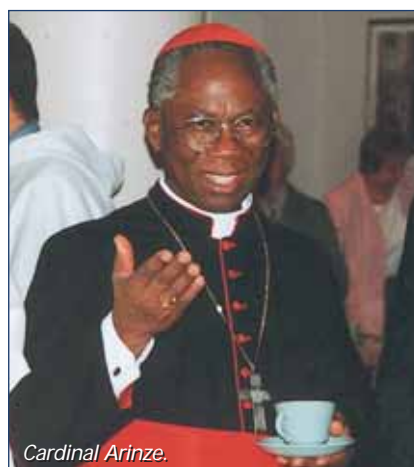
Lisa Vincent, Holocaust Survivor, speaking in Council Chamber



Children from Sparkenhoe Junior School present a drama related to the Holocaust.

Of importance were initiatives arising out of an **East Midlands Regional Conference** held on May 11th 1994 at the Grand Hotel in Leicester chaired by the Bishop of Leicester and organised by the Inner Cities Religious Council, a body set up by the Department of the Environment. Before the conference several members of the LCoF visited Liverpool to see projects set up in the inner city area by the different faiths. The conference was addressed by Tony Baldry, Minister of State at the Department of the Environment; and the new Single Regeneration Budget for inner city areas was explained. Following that meeting, dialogue with the City Council has led to a number of key developments including the eventual appointment by the City Council of a Policy Officer for Faiths, Angela Berryman.

Public lectures have included, most significantly, one in 1996 by the late Rabbi Hugo Gryn formerly of the West London Synagogue and one in 1998 by Francis Cardinal Arinze, of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, based in Rome, who was also the chief Roman Catholic international spokesman on interfaith relations.

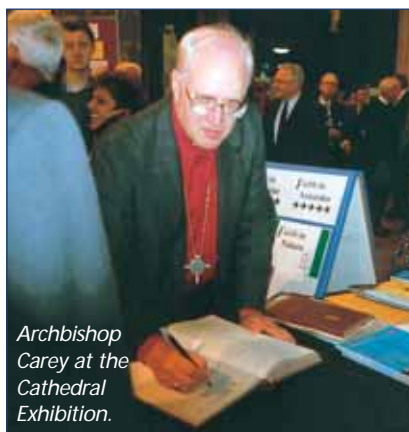


Cardinal Arinze.

The LCoF has an ongoing concern for **education** and in 1996 an essay competition was held for school children on the theme of 'How religions can work together to make a better life for us all.' In May 1997 a **seminar on the theme of collective worship** in schools was held at

Leicester University and the opinions expressed were fed back into a national consultation which produced a report that was passed on to government. The Council supported the bringing of the **Anne Frank Exhibition** to the New Walk Museum in Leicester in September that year.

In October 1997 member bodies of the LCoF contributed to an exhibition ***Faith in Leicester***, which was held in conjunction with the National Religious Education Festival and the 70th Anniversary of the consecration of Leicester Cathedral. The exhibition was opened by the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, who also visited different places of worship.



Archbishop Carey at the Cathedral Exhibition.



Alex Keller at the Exhibition.

Another area of particular concern for the LCoF has been that of health, and it has been instrumental in setting up a **Faith and Health Forum**, whose first formal meeting was in 1997, with Dr Rashmi Shukla of Leicestershire Health and Mr Faiyazuddin Ahmad as co-chairs.

The LCoF, as one of the longer established Councils of Faith in the country, has been a **resource to**

other interfaith groups and hosted dialogue sessions for representatives of Birmingham Council of Faiths, an Interfaith Forum from Luton and one from Middlesborough.

Representatives went to Brussels in 2002 for a conference *Building Plural Communities*, when we also put our views before our European MPs Mel Read and the late Philip Whitehead. Other work of this nature is detailed in VISITS below (page 17).

In 1997, as a result of a three way partnership between the Council of Faiths, Leicester City Council and the Bishop St Methodist Church, an Administrator was appointed with an office in Pilgrim House, 10 Bishop Street. Part of his brief has been the planning and day to day management of the **Welcome Centre** in the same premises which was opened by Sir Peter Soulsby on April 12 1999.



Tony Stokes, Co-ordinator, holding up the banner of the faiths, photo Kiyotaka Sato.

The first Administrator was Andrew Goodliffe (1997-2000). He established the Centre under difficult circumstances with unfinished building work. The present Co-ordinator, Tony Stokes has strengthened the administrative side enormously.

By 1999, the Council had developed in such a way that a qualified accountant was needed to guide us through the complications of proper

reporting. The Revd David Clark, who joined the Council in 1998, found Malcolm Veall, who since then has assisted the Honorary Treasurer, and managed the payroll. David had a vocation to pray in the city and work for interfaith relations, while serving as a part time Curate at St James the Greater. He was appointed Assistant Secretary and helped to manage the office and the Welcome Centre with the administrator Andrew Goodliffe, who was followed by Tony Stokes.



Revd David Clark.

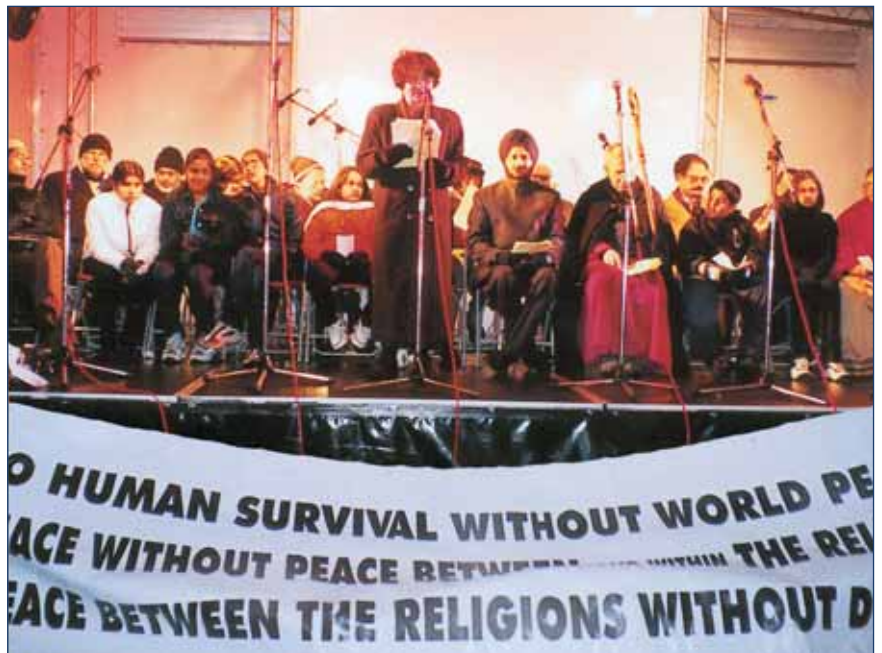
Suleman Nagdi formerly Secretary of the Federation of Muslim Organisations and now Public Relations Officer, was one of the enthusiastic supporters of Christian/Muslim football. He writes: 'Following the football match played between the Clergy and the Imams on the 21st Jan. 2006 and its recognition by the House of Commons that led to an Early Day Motion being signed by a number of MPs, the setting up of a second football match, with the Police and the Imams of Leicester has been arranged. It is hoped that through events of this nature Leicester will bring about greater unity and respect for each other.



Suleman Nagdi with Falyazuddin Ahmad.

In interfaith circles the events of 9/11 and 7/7 created a need to show common solidarity across the faiths in shock and sadness that such violence could be perpetrated in the name of religion. Thus, religious leaders swiftly agreed to meet for common prayer outside the Town Hall, in commemoration of those who died.

Royal Visits have occurred. In 2002, as part of her Golden Jubilee celebrations, the Queen paid a visit to Leicester. Among other places, she visited the Guru Nanak Gurdwara in Holy Bones, an historic occasion as it was her first visit to a Sikh Gurdwara in Britain. (picture hard copy) This took place at the same time as the Duke of Edinburgh opened the Leicester Cathedral new Visitor Centre. Prince Edward and Sophie visited the Jain Centre. ■



Post 9/11 memorial event at Moat Community College with Minou Cortazzi leading prayer.

The complete text of the banner is a version of Hans Küng's famous dictum. It states -

**NO SURVIVAL WITHOUT WORLD PEACE
NO PEACE WITHOUT PEACE BETWEEN AND WITHIN THE RELIGIONS
NO PEACE BETWEEN THE RELIGIONS WITHOUT DIALOGUE**



The President of the Guru Nanak Gurdwara presents the Queen with a golden sword.



Sophie, Countess of Wessex at the Jain Temple.

Dialogue Work

Andrew Wingate

Dialogue, encounter or friendship between people of faith, happens in all kinds of informal ways, as they go about their daily life and work. However, there is also a place for groups established with the explicit intention of furthering mutual understanding. This has happened widely in Leicester in recent years, where there have been sustained groups across various faiths. Earlier, Ataullah Siddiqui and Revd Gordon Sealy successfully convened Muslim/Christian encounters for seven years (1985-1992) with between 10 & 50 participants. Many of these were sixth formers and students. The newer groups are complementary to the much older Council of Faiths, and owe much to the good relationships established over the last twenty years. The following groups are now already established:

- **The Muslim-Christian Dialogue Group** is based at St Philip's Centre. Besides theology and scripture, a range of subjects have been tackled such as racism, education, international issues and their effect upon Leicester, asylum questions, mission and conversion, law and order questions, the Danish cartoons issue. Particular actions have been taken up, including the sharing of fasting each year on one of the days of Ramadan. There have been several common dinners, when there has been considerable fund raising for common causes, such as the Lord Mayor's Appeal, and Muslim and Christian projects in Malawi, Bosnia, Palestine, Gujarat.



Richard Atkinson, Chair of St Philip's Centre and Archdeacon of Leicester with Dr Manazir Ahsan, Director General of the Islamic Foundation, concludes agreement.

- **The Muslim-Christian Women's Group** has met at the St Philip's Centre about every six weeks since 2003. The atmosphere is one of fun and friendship,



The Revd Diane Johnson with Mrs Rabiha Hannan and her children.

and the sense of shared spirituality is very strong, as prayers and readings are included as a routine within meetings. Personal stories and family events are shared, and barriers broken down, as well as serious engagement taking place around contentious issues. Support is given to an Asylum Seeker work, as well as the common work with the other Muslim-Christian Group. Members of the group made a presentation at the World Parliament of the World's Religions, in Barcelona, in 2004, and have been represented with the other group, in Brussels and Paris, at Soul of Europe, and Muslim-Christian Awareness Week gatherings, where Leicester has been almost the only UK participant selected to share our work.

- **The Hindu-Christian Forum** was established in 2002, with the help of the Teape Foundation in Cambridge, and meets at various temples and churches in Leicester, five times a year. It is the only such regular group in the country, and has links through its membership with the National Hindu-Christian Forum. Dialogue around serious topics takes place, including the meaning behind festivals, the nature of God, the place of icons and images, the use of scriptures, attitudes to the environment, and non-violence. Scriptures are considered, particularly the Gospels and the Gita. More contentious issues are also addressed, such as mission and conversion, caste and class, reincarnation and resurrection, where common agreement is not easily achieved! A highlight was the visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury in 2004, when he chose Leicester as the place where he would engage with the Hindu community.



Andrew Wingate and Ibrahim Mogra.

- **The Family of Abraham Group** is a small but important group for the fact that it holds together three faiths - Jewish, Christian and Muslim - who each hold Abraham/Ibrahim important in different ways, who have much in common in their history and world views, but who have so often found themselves at odds. This is focussed at the present time on what all three faiths see as the Holy Land. But concentration has been on building up a growing understanding of the commonalities and differences between our faiths, in their theologies and practices. We meet alternatively in a synagogue, church or mosque, which in itself is a learning experience.
- **The Hindu-Muslim Group** has met when there have been tensions between these two large communities, for example, at the time of the clashes in Gujarat in 2003. Though it does not meet regularly, it can be called at any time, because of the trust that difference can be faced and constructive leadership provided when there are problems.
- **Sikh involvement in dialogue.** The inclusiveness of Sikhism makes it a natural dialogue partner. There have long been annual occasions, when other faiths have been invited into dialogue with Sikhs, and the present Chair of the Council of Faiths, Resham Sandhu, has greatly encouraged this. He has also been encouraging the establishment of bilateral dialogues, and a start has been made with Jews and with Muslims. Plans are being laid for a Sikh-Christian dialogue group.



The Sikh "Five Beloveds" leading the Vaisakhi procession.

All these groups could not exist without the hard work and sustained commitment of groups of individuals deeply committed to the dialogical process through difficulties as well as joys. We rely also on Kathy Morrison for her administrative help with all of these groups. The umbrella support of the Council of Faiths is vital to us all. There is much talk of interfaith dialogue, particularly since 7/7. We can say that in Leicester we actually do it, and that it is, as Rowan Williams puts it, a surprise and a joy, as we discuss what matters most to us *holiness, being at peace, and what truly is.* ■



Canon Andrew Wingate's work in dialogue has also given rise to an ambitious project: The St Philip's Centre, of which he is the Director. This Centre builds on a long history of good interfaith relations in Leicester. It is a training resource affirmed by the Presence and Engagement process of the Church of England (along with a sister Centre in Bradford), and its trustees now include the Diocese of Leicester, the Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches. It has a partnership agreement with the Islamic Foundation in Markfield and is in discussion with the Hindu Study Centre in Oxford and the Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad, South India. The Centre was officially opened by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, on June 2nd 2006.



Student with Janita Shah (Jain member of LCoF).

Other Projects

Over the years there have been many projects. We give a few examples.

The Photographic Project

This provided a CD of Places of Worship in the City for the Resource centre of the Education Department. With the developments of the past few years this project needs updating. A selection of shots from the CD forms a collage on the back of this brochure.

Two Key Conferences

In August 2001 and July 2003 respectively the Council of Faiths organised two conferences. The first was on the theme *The Future of Multi-ethnic Britain* and explored the Parekh Report of that name, and the second focussed on *The Future of Multi-faith Britain*. As one of the foremost diverse cities in the UK we wanted to promote the advantage of grounding discussions of the big picture themes in local realities.

In 2001 we heard about city riots in some northern cities and how race and faith are not easily distinguished in the popular mind. In 2003 we discussed the end of interfaith innocence in the shadow of 9/11. But mostly our conferences proved that there is no escaping the task of listening deeply to one another. One speaker cited from a lecture given at the Edinburgh Festival of 1999: 'I may not agree with you, but the free expression of your ideas allows me to see how things may not be as clear-cut as I had previously thought, I had not thought about it like that before.' This could so easily be a motto for all dialogue between religions and cultures.

At our conferences we realised that if the faith communities cannot learn how to approach the problem of living together in mutual hope then we will remain part of the problem. Surely this is the challenge facing all of us from now on?



Hindu-Muslim conversation: Natubhbhai Jagivan, Ramanbhai Barber, Manzoor Mogul.

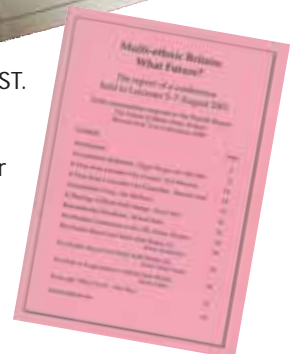
Publications

The LCoF publishes the following:

- 1) An Overview of the Major Faiths in the City of Leicester – An Overview. This document is the basis for a four hour presentation undertaken by Tony Stokes and others from the LCoF, which has been much valued by different sectors of the community, such as businesses and Social Services.



- 2) Places of Worship: a list of over 240 places of worship.
- 3) An occasional Newsletter, entitled TRUST.
- 4) Multi-ethnic Britain: What Future? The report of a conference held in Leicester 5-7 August 2001.



Some Visits

- In November 1998 a group of seven members of the Council of Faiths, from five different faith communities, visited Leicester's twin city of Strasbourg in Alsace, France, with the intention of developing the relationship between the two cities in the context of a faith perspective.



Delegation to Strasbourg.

The group met a wide variety of people with a faith interest, including Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Jews and Baha'is. A visit was made to the headquarters of the Protestant Church for a discussion on the relations between Protestants and Muslims. Unlike the rest of France where state education is in purely secular schools, Alsace and Lorraine offer distinct provision in Religious Education for Protestant, Catholic and Jewish children and many are hoping that this will be extended for the benefit of Muslim children. This situation was explained by the teacher responsible for Catholic Religious Education in Strasbourg at a visit to a local school, whilst at a later meeting with a member of the Protestant Faculty at the University of Strasbourg the group learned of a campaign to found an Islamic Faculty.

Among places of worship the group visited the main synagogue, which had been built when the Jews returned after the war, and two mosques, Turkish and Maghrebian. An informal evening was held with the Baha'i community. At each place everyone was made extremely welcome and discussions took place on the differing role of the faiths in the two cities.

- Alan Race and David Clark attended the Parliament of the World's Religions gathering of 6,000 people in Cape Town, South Africa in 1999. There they appreciated the contribution of the faith communities united in the struggle for the overthrow of apartheid. The issue of HIV/AIDS was at the forefront of everyone's minds.
- Mr Singh Sandhu and Revd David Clark were invited to a conference in Hanover, Germany, to share ideas with German faith leaders and provide models for the establishment of a Council of Faiths there.
- A civic party including the Chair as Lord Mayor's spiritual adviser visited the Punjab, India.
- From July 2004 to Jan 2005 Council of Faiths members, along with Muslims and Christians from Leicester, made 2 day visits to Burnley, Bradford and Manchester, which are all centres with high Muslim populations and which had experienced racial and religious conflict. The aim was both to share and to learn. In Burnley we were impressed with the Building Bridges Interfaith project which worked in schools to break down prejudice, and the unique Catholic/ Methodist church. In Bradford we walked round Manningham, the scene of the riots, and saw how communities are working together, and met a very assertive Muslim woman who hoped to be the first woman to serve on the Council of Mosques. In Manchester we inspired those who were new to Christian-Muslim dialogue. We met the Muslim Lord Mayor at the splendid Town Hall, discovered how to put on an interfaith festival, and - the highlight for many - shared in a Zicca ceremony (Dhikr - remembrance of God) in a Sufi Mosque.

- In October 2001 Councillor Manjula Sood and the Revd Alan Race attended a conference on behalf of the LCoF in Glasgow on the Global Ethic Declaration, which had been devised by Hans Küng the celebrated Catholic theologian, for the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993. The conference reflected on balancing the need for shared values in society with the celebration of diversity among religions and cultures. The Exhibition of the Global Ethic was displayed in Leicester's Shires Shopping Centre for our 2001 conference.



Preparing for Barcelona 2004.

- Several members of the LCoF attended the Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona in July 2004. For the young people of faith in Leicester it was also a highlight in their Media work. Under the direction of Sandra Herbert, young Christians, Hindus and Muslims learned the tools of the media trade, journalism and broadcasting. Armed with cameras, notebooks, recording equipment and their own enthusiasm, these young Leicester ambassadors of faith met, mingled, interviewed, photographed and documented this amazing global event, both in the majestic setting of the monastic retreat of Montserrat and the bustling city site in Barcelona.



Sandra Herbert (in white) with members of Barcelona 2004 youth team.

They participated in seminars alongside some of the world's top religious leaders; they challenged and argued and raised their concerns that young people of faith felt marginalized. They got angry when snubbed by some who didn't see them as important, but encouraged by others who saw their potential for bringing about tolerance and understanding. Often the encounters were by chance - Georg meeting the famous theologian Hans Küng sheltering in the rain, Sumaya bumping into a Buddhist monk outside the Basilica and discovering firsthand what his faith meant for world peace, Deepa meeting a Wiccan over breakfast. It was truly a once in a lifetime experience. The group still meets and inputs into BBC Radio Leicester's Faith website and aims to expand its link with local media through a new studio based in the centre of Leicester.



Georg interviews Sikh volunteers.

The International Voluntary Service Interfaith Gardening Work Camp

This is one of the few pieces of work supported by the LCoF which is directly for young people. For the past ten years it has offered a unique experience for 10 international volunteers to make a contribution to the faiths of Leicester while also receiving from these communities. We have unique contacts with the faiths to enable our volunteers to appreciate how a mutually accepting society might work.

This work camp is sponsored by the *Elchanan Elkes Association for Inter Community Understanding* in partnership with LCoF and the Educational Charity Christians Aware. Volunteers do practical work: gardening in the grounds of buildings of worship of different faiths; a Mosque, a Church, a Synagogue, Buddhist and Hindu Temples, some painting and decorating. A visit is also invariably arranged to the Holocaust Memorial Centre at Laxton near Newark, where the volunteers often tend the gardens of remembrance, visit the museum and listen to a Holocaust survivor.

The Work Camp has been organised by David Clark of the LCoF, Kim Gordon (former Community Worker and member of the African-Caribbean community), and Sara Elkes with help from Christians Aware. ■



Volunteers at Beth Shalom Holocaust Memorial Centre.

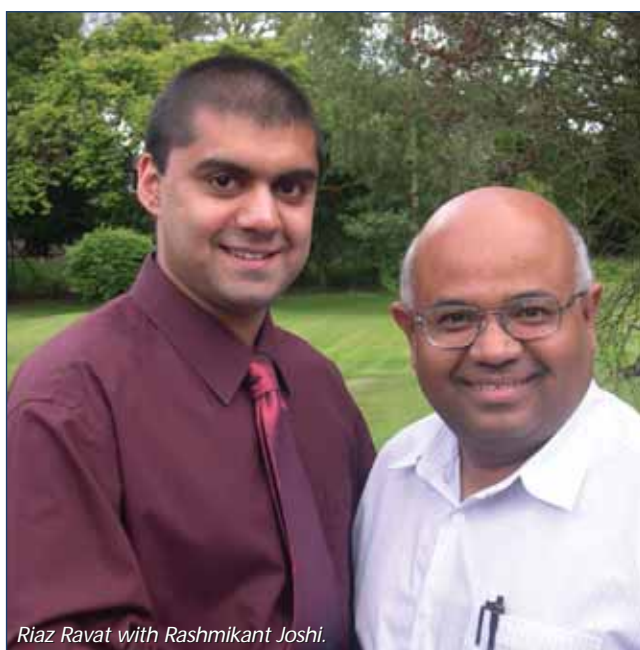


Faith Regeneration Network

Whilst the LCoF embraces 8 major faith traditions, the Faith Regeneration Network is much wider. There are currently over 250 groups on the database of the Faith Regeneration Officer, Mel Parkin. Tony Nelson from the Leicester Hebrew congregation as elected 2 years ago to represent these groups on the Leicester Partnership and recently became one of the Voluntary & Community Sector's representatives on the Executive. This period has seen the creation of Leicester's Community Strategy (the long-term vision of where we want Leicester to be in 20 years) and the first Local Area Agreement.

So, what is Regeneration and how can Faith Groups contribute? It's about using Government funding wisely to improve the quality of life of all Leicester's people, particularly those in the most deprived neighbourhoods. We need all neighbourhoods to be clean, green and safe. Young people's educational opportunities need to be improved as well as healthcare for all, especially the elderly. Opportunities are to be provided for local people and community groups (including faith groups) to have a voice in deciding how money should be spent on public services for their neighbourhoods. Faith groups can have their say and use their influence at local Area Committee meetings. ■

Social Action by the Faith Communities of Leicester



Riaz Ravat with Rashmikanth Joshi.

Embracing The Present, Planning The Future, by Riaz Ravat, formerly Faiths Regeneration Officer.

As the primary multi-faith city in the UK, does anyone know how Leicester's diverse faiths help the well being of local communities? The comprehensive report tells you! It is available from the Welcome Centre.

For the first time we are able to find out about the scale of this contribution.

This comprehensive report discovered that:

- 240 faith groups across 14 faiths operate in Leicester
- 443 social projects function including support for people with HIV & Aids, assistance for asylum seekers and refugees, football coaching and childcare provisions
- Faith groups service all parts of the city, with at least two faith organisations in every city ward

- Over half of all faith groups are engaged in social action (52%)

Volunteering within the faith communities is extensive. 83% of projects are aided by volunteers, an in-kind contribution of nearly £5 million per year.

Faith groups operate in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Leicester such as Spinney Hills and New Parks where they provide 'social arenas' where community activities can flourish.

They are trusted organisations rooted in local areas, able to cater for hard to reach groups by offering faith and culturally sensitive environments for their spiritual and social needs.

Faith communities face many challenges. Communities could be better supported if barriers such as the poor record of faith groups accessing external funding and the need for more volunteers were removed. Currently only 22% of faith-led projects receive external funding.

Social partners such as criminal justice agencies and health service providers need to increase the levels of partnership working with faith communities to better understand each other, share resources and launch joint initiatives to combat social exclusion.

The Leicester Faiths Regeneration Project which is sponsored by the Diocese of Leicester, Leicester Council of Faiths and Voluntary Action Leicester through the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit. All 240 faith groups were contacted for this research during the second half of 2003.

The research was enhanced by a good response rate of 67%, response rates of over 50% from the four largest faith communities in Leicester (Christian, Hindu, Islam & Sikh), and responses received from smaller faiths including Brahma Kumaris, Quakers and Unitarians.

Recommendations include the need for increased funding and assistance for faith-led community projects; more local inter-faith networks to build on the work of the Leicester Council of Faiths and other existing faith partnerships; and faith groups to adopt structures and working practices that encourage greater youth and female involvement particularly at committee level.

Central government believes firmly that faith communities matter. If Leicester is to 'embrace the present and plan its future' by maintaining its reputation of being an inclusive city, it must pioneer new ways in inter faith relations to set the standards for other cities throughout the UK and beyond. ■

The Faiths Regeneration Project

Mel Parkin – Faiths Regeneration Officer



This project works at a faith community level, as well as with faith community leaders, where we explore ways of encouraging people to build cohesive peaceful communities. We believe this is important particularly at a time when there is so much misunderstanding, ignorance and fear leading to violence and intolerance.

Our work involves:

- Faith Exchange visits – discovering the person behind the faith label.
- Network Events – creating space for communities to share information, ideas and challenges and go away with new knowledge and skills.
- Creating a Young Person's Council of Faiths – to be established before the end of 2006.

- Intercultural & Communication Leadership School (ICLS)
 - 18-30s attending a 4-day residential learning:
 - about other faiths
 - community leadership skills
 - conflict resolution skills
 - how to work with the media

Selected verses from The Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 5, sum up for me what this work is about:

- *Blessed are the poor in spirit for there is the kingdom of heaven* – the sense of God and the willingness to seek it can be found in most faiths.
- *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied* – striving to ensure that what is right and true for all is another way in which we can come together.
- *Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God* – includes all who make peace between people, whether as individuals or as communities, and is what faith is all about.

Relations with other faiths does not diminish our own faith but strengthens and enhances it when we are secure in what we believe. ■

Why Religions Must Reach Across Divisions

Alan Race

Must religious communities be for ever rivals? Leicester has gained a high reputation in Britain for being a diverse city that is managing its relations between religions quite well. Central government departments come here to consult with local religious leaders and with the Council of Faiths. So have international research groups. They've been asking why our interreligious relations seem quite healthy. It is true that so far we have escaped the violence that other multifaith cities, such as Bradford or Oldham, have experienced...

When people of different faiths listen to one another openly, they soon learn that truthful religious vision is not the sole possession of any one community. Through trustful encounter we recover a shared traditional truth. This is the recognition that religious vision can never be grasped fully by limited human beings. Once we realise this, we are freed to cherish our religious differences as part of a bigger picture of what religion really celebrates. The divine reality is a mystery; human beings have their partial perspectives on it.

Religions are often accused of being part of the problem in modern cities. But if we learn to value our differences, we might become part of the solution instead. ■

An extract from a First Person article written for the Leicester Mercury by the Revd Alan Race prior to the 2003 conference entitled "The Future of Multifaith Britain".



John Lally and Alan Race.

Two Reflections



The Ven Michael Ipgrave in the centre with a visiting group to Leicester.

I was fortunate to be involved in the developing life and work of Leicester Council of Faiths during the 1990s, a time when Leicester was establishing a national profile as one of the most religiously diverse, and inter-religiously co-operative, cities in the country. With the quiet but steady encouragement of Faiyazuddin Ahmad as our Chair, we were able to consolidate an effective pattern of working relationships with Leicester City Council, and with a range of other public and voluntary sector organisations. As the Council of Faiths found itself increasingly being approached for consultation on civic issues, we became more and more aware of the need to strengthen our infrastructure of organisation and communication. This in turn led to what seemed at times a never-ending series of negotiations over funding and support, so that some of us found an increasing amount of our time and energy taken up with negotiations over service contracts, performance indicators and the like. All this was to bear fruit, though, in the appointment of one of the first ever municipally funded 'Faiths Officers' in the country, and subsequently in the establishment of a centrally located Welcome Centre.

Looking back on those developments ten years on, three things strike me as remarkable.

Firstly, the level of trust we had established was such that in our planning together for the Council's future we scarcely paused to think of ourselves as belonging to different faiths: what we were working for together was a common voice for the city's faith communities.

Secondly, the progress we made in our partnerships with the City Council and others moved us into territory which was uncharted at the time, but which in retrospect can be seen as pioneering for the future – the 'faiths agenda' is now firmly on the mental map of local and national government, 'faiths officers' abound at every level, and public funding for faith communities and interfaith organisations is widely available.

Thirdly, and most significantly, despite the ever-present danger of being swamped by external pressures, we never lost our focus on the primary purpose that had brought us together: the growth in understanding and respect which we found in exploring the differences as well as the common grounds of our religious faiths and practices. In the end, as a Christian, I believe that the depth and durability of the friendships we experienced through the Council of Faiths can only find its explanation

in the good purposes of the God who called us together at this remarkable time in this remarkable city. ■

The Venerable Michael Ipgrave,
Archdeacon of Southwark

It has been said that "within each of us is a space that only God can fill". Everyone is in some way in search of God, often a restless search, sometimes undertaken unknowingly. We seek answers to the riddles of life: what is the meaning of death, of pain, of suffering? We yearn for a world where there is neither darkness nor cold, but where the deepest needs and highest aspirations of the human heart are wholly satisfied. We stand on tiptoe to reach out to One who, at times, seems almost within our reach, yet is always beyond our grasp.

Sadly, in our modern secular world many have been robbed of a sense of the presence of God. There is an absence of the dimension of depth, transcendence, ultimate meaning, call it what you will.

Yet you have only to visit one of great multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-faith neighbourhoods of Leicester to sense the atmosphere of the holy mingled with the everyday: as people travel to and from church, synagogue, mosque, temple or gurdwara for prayer, as they greet one another in the name of God, as they pray in their homes, as they regulate their life and that of their community by religious festivals. Their shops, their clothing, often display the symbols of their faith.

The good news of one faith community and the story to which it witnesses, will not be the same as that of another, but as we share our stories, our visions of that by which we find life and meaning, there will undoubtedly be shared resonances, and the emergence of a common vision for our nation. ■

Bishop David Silk

Special Greetings

from Past Chairs & Honorary Life Members:



All human endeavours initiated with sincerity, selflessness, clear vision and integrated team work are destined to succeed. This is the story of LCoF, which is now 20 years old and a vibrant organisation with the continued input of all faith communities who have made Leicester the most talked about and admired multi-faith city of Britain.

There were many who in the early years of LCoF took pains to carry its office in their briefcases and hold the LCoF meetings around the city at its members' offices or residences. Now, since the LCoF has attained a status with the City Council, the Universities, the University Hospital Leicester Trust, the Police, the Fire & Rescue Service, as well as all the local and national government and semi-government bodies, it is time to reflect on our achievements as well as our failings. Thus we can recharge our batteries and take the LCoF to new heights and make it more relevant to the grassroots realities of the faith scene in Leicester.

I can see a very bright future for the LCoF in the coming years, and I am honoured to be one of its old guards.

Syed Faiyazuddin Ahmad



I am really happy to congratulate the Leicester Council of Faith on 20th Anniversary. As having the honour of being one of the founder members of Interfaith Network I remember the days in 1987 when we met with then Lord Mayor Setchfield to form a faith council in Leicester. I remember Ven David Silk and Martin Forward who worked hard to start it. It worked and today we are 20 years old with many founder members still working with us. Today it has been recognised by the Government and semi government departments with many other organisations. Today we have good achiever Resham Sandhu as chairman who is leading it very nicely.

I wish this council still grow up and try bridge the faiths together. May God bless us. Keep it up.

Nathubhai Jagjivan



Over the years the Leicester Council of Faiths has generated a genuine engagement between the faith communities and recognised each others' boundaries and gateways. It has been a beacon of light of working together in a world where dogma and diatribes persistently push their boundaries and set their agendas. The Council has been instrumental for the mutual empowerment of faiths towards their engagement in public life and joint pursuit of social justice in the city. The partnership that it has built, for example, with the City Council, is an excellent example of faiths working together with the civic bodies for the common good of all citizens. It has been a rewarding experience for me to be associated with such a venture and I hope that the LCoF will continue to bear fruit for many generations to come.

Ataulah Siddiqui



As a founder member of Leicester Council of Faiths, I am proud and privileged to congratulate the Council on its 20th Anniversary. The foundation of LCoF is laid on trust, equality, understanding, tolerance and acceptance of all without distinction of caste, creed or colour. Nature itself has provided and created diversity in its topography, perhaps in order that our life does not become too monotonous. The Council has achieved tremendous success in its twenty years' history. The pinnacle was achieved when the Archbishop of Canterbury organised a conference in Lambeth Palace to share the secret of success with other religious leaders from the country. The Council has found partners in their advancement and achievement in city council officials, an understanding Press and in the Police Authority. I pray to the Almighty God to bless all council members and the community at large to stay in harmony and set an example to the world that religion is a bonding factor and not a divisive factor.

Thakersibhai Morjaria

