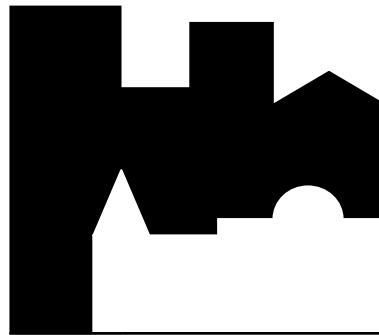


# Living with other faiths

*A Presence and Engagement Resource*



Prepared by The Revd Jonathan Evens  
for the Contextual Theology Centre  
[www.theology-centre.org](http://www.theology-centre.org)

*“This pack does a **vital** job – in making the experience of Christians in multi faith areas a **gift to the wider church.**”*

Canon Guy Wilkinson  
National Inter Religious Affairs Adviser &  
Secretary for Inter Religious Affairs  
to the Archbishop of Canterbury

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## Introduction

For some Christians, 'inter faith relations' mean daily, face-to-face meeting. For others, different faiths are mostly encountered through the media.

Whatever your context, this pack can help you

- identify Biblical principles for engaging with people and congregations of other faiths
- develop understanding of their beliefs and sensitivity to their practices
- work out the best ways for your church to build relationships with other faiths

***“Although only 5.4% of the population identified themselves as being of a faith other than Christianity in the 2001 census, these figures look set to rise in the coming years, particularly in urban and inner-city areas.”***

*Presence & Engagement report*

## Context and need

Of the 12,226 parishes in England, more than half include a population that identifies themselves as being of another faith. A recent Church of England report found that a growing number of church leaders in multi-faith areas felt they lacked proper theological training to respond to the presence of other faith groups and remained unsure of the Church's mission in this context. It is in response to this context and these needs that the Contextual Theology Centre is providing this resource pack to help congregations explore why we should engage with other faith communities and how we can go about doing so.

## Objectives

The pack's objectives are to:

- identify biblical principles for engaging with other faith communities;
- develop understanding of the beliefs and sensitivity to the practices of other faith communities; and
- consider a range of ways of engaging with other faith communities and to identify particular ways appropriate to your parish.

***“This pack is excellent in its flexibility, its resources, and its development of a Christian understanding of how to operate in the context of other faiths”***

*Pat Stevens,  
Parish of St John, Stanmore*

## Content

The pack addresses the following resource questions:

*Why?* This section has bible study materials that explore reasons why we should engage with people of other faiths and ideas on how we can do this;

*Who?* This section provides brief descriptions of the beliefs and practices of the main faith communities in the UK.

*Where?* This section has information about the locations of faith communities in the UK and advice about making initial contact.

*What?* This section provides ideas/case studies for a range of different ways in which congregations could engage with faith communities.

*How?* This section suggests ways of deciding how and in what way congregations could engage with faith communities.



## Using the Pack

The pack isn't an 'off-the-shelf' course. It is a collection of Bible studies, stories of Christian engagement and other practical information.

You can use the pack to build study days and courses—or to help you prepare sermons and lead small groups—drawing on the sections that most address your concerns and needs.

Here are some ideas of different ways in which the materials might be used:

### **Bible Study series**

*A six session series comprising:*

- Session 1 – 'Encounters with Jesus' bible study (1.1.1) leading into the 'Faith Communities Quiz' using 'Faith Communities beliefs and practices' (2.1 & 2.2);
- Session 2 – 'Good Neighbours' bible study (1.3) leading into 'Stories of encounter' (4.1);
- Session 3 – 'Encounters with Paul' bible study (1.1.2) leading into 'Contacting Faith Communities' (3.1-3.4);
- Session 4 – 'Making Disciples' bible study (1.4) leading into 'Scenarios for group discussion' (2.3);
- Session 5 – 'Sharing God's concerns' (1.2.0) leading into 'Case Studies' (4.2);
- Session 6 – 'Destroying hostility (1.5) leading into 'From encounter to engagement' (5.1).

### **Living with other faiths course**

*A four week course covering:*

- Week 1: *Why engage?* – 'Embassy, hospitality and dialogue' as pre-reading (1.7). Small group discussions of 'Sharing God's concerns' (1.2), 'Good neighbours' (1.3), 'Making disciples' (1.4), and 'Hostility destroyed' (1.5). One per group with feedback in plenary. Plenary discussion of 'Dialogue and conversation' (1.6). Project work – visit to a faith group prior to Week 4.
- Week 2: *Who to engage with?* 'Contacting Faith Communities' as pre-reading (3.1-3.4). 'Faith Communities Quiz' (2.2.0) using 'Faith Communities beliefs and practices' (2.1). Small group discussions of 'Scenarios for group discussion' (2.3). One per group with feedback in plenary.
- Week 3: *How to engage?* - 'Stories of encounter' (4.1) as pre reading and for discussion in pairs. Small group discussion of 'Case Studies' (4.2). One per group with feedback in plenary.
- Week 4: *Engagement reports* – Each course member to give a short presentation on their visit to another faith group.



### Study Day

- Icebreaker: 'Stories of encounter' (4.1) for discussion in pairs. Introduce partner and share one story you identified with and one personal story.
- Bible Study: Small group discussions of 'Encounters with Jesus and Paul' (1.1). One per group with feedback in plenary. Plenary discussion of 'Dialogue and conversation' (1.6).
- Case Studies: Small group discussion of two from 'Case Studies' (4.2). One per group with feedback in plenary.
- Quiz: 'Faith Communities Quiz' (2.2) using 'Faith Communities beliefs and practices' (2.1).
- Scenarios: Small group discussions of 'Scenarios for group discussion' (2.3). One per group with feedback in plenary. Give out 'Contacting Faith Communities' for background reading (3.1-3.4).
- Case Studies: Small group discussion of two from 'Case Studies' (4.2). One per group with feedback in plenary.
- Close: 'From encounter to engagement' (5.1).

### ***"I'm in a multi-faith parish. We want to begin engaging with people of other faiths"***

#### **Four week course**

- Week 1: *Why engage?* – Small group discussions of 'Good neighbours' and 'Encounters with Jesus' (1.3 & 1.1) with feedback in plenary. Project work – visit to a faith group prior to Week 4
- Week 2: *Who to engage with?* 'Contacting Faith Communities' as pre-reading (3.1-3.4). 'Faith Communities Quiz' (2.2) using 'Faith Communities beliefs and practices' (2.1). Small group discussions of 'Scenarios for group discussions' (2.3). One per group with feedback in plenary.
- Week 3: *How to engage?* - 'Stories of encounter' (4.1) as pre reading and for discussion in pairs. Small group discussion of 'Case Studies' (4.2). One per group with feedback in plenary.
- Week 4: *Engagement reports* – Each course member to give a short presentation on their visit to another faith group. 'From encounter to engagement' (5.1).



***“I’m in a multi-faith parish where we are already engaging with people of other faiths but want to review what we do and how we do it”***

**Suggested activities for meeting, course or study day**

- ‘Stories of encounter’ (4.1) - share one story you identified with and one personal story.
- List the ways in which your parish engages with people of other faiths.
- Group discussion of ‘Dialogue and conversation’ (1.6) before reviewing its relevance to the ways in which your parish engages with people of other faiths.
- Present the ‘Embassy, hospitality and dialogue’ material (1.7) and discuss its relevance to the ways in which your parish engages with people of other faiths.
- Review the ‘Case Studies’ (4.2) and discuss their relevance to the ways in which your parish engages with people of other faiths.
- Sum up these discussions by listing ways in these materials support or challenge the ways in which your parish engages with people of other faiths.

***“I’m in a parish that isn’t multi-faith but where we realise we need to address the issues for those in our congregation who encounter people of other faiths at work”***

**Suggested activities for meeting, course or study day**

- Icebreaker: ‘Stories of encounter’ (4.1) for discussion in pairs. Share one story you identified with in the handout and one personal story from your workplace.
- Quiz: ‘Faith Communities Quiz’ (2.2) using ‘Faith Communities beliefs and practices’ (2.1). As you find the answers think what difference knowing this kind of information could make as you encounter people of other faiths in your workplace.
- Look at ‘Guidance & etiquette’ section of ‘Contacting Faith Communities’ (3.4) and ‘Christian Approaches to People of Other Faiths’ (5.2) before thinking what difference knowing this kind of information could make as you encounter people of other faiths in your workplace..
- ‘Good Neighbours’ bible study (1.3) leading into ‘From encounter to engagement’ (5.1) and listing places of encounter in your workplace (instead of in the parish).



As you use the materials it would be good to keep a list of all the different ways of engaging with faith communities that emerge from your discussions and then to use this list of ideas as part of the process set out in Section 5.

The materials in the pack are intended as resources for congregations. It is not essential to use all of them or to use them in the order suggested by the structure of this pack. The why, who, where structure of the pack might be one that you wish to use but please feel free to rearrange the materials into a different order if that suits the way you wish to use the materials with your congregation or to cherry pick the materials that will work in your context.

All we wish to do by providing this pack is to encourage congregations to engage with their local faith communities. How you do that and how you use the materials in this pack is down to you.

***“The most helpful Study Day I have attended on inter Faith issues.”***

*Revd Colin Marchant, Newham Baptist minister, evaluating a study day based on the Pack*

***“I just read your resource pack. I am amazed at all the work that you put into it. It is so powerful.”***

*Beatrice Buchanan, St Margaret’s, Barking*



# Section I

## Why engage with faith communities? Bible study materials

### Section introduction

This section contains bible study materials that explore reasons why we should engage with people of other faiths and ideas on how we can do this.

The studies are based on the premise that the contexts in which Israel, Jesus and the Early Church lived and ministered were multi-faith and that encounters with people who were not Jews are generally encounters with people of another faith.

These bible studies are arranged in three groups. First, there are studies looking at the encounters of Jesus and Paul with those of other faiths. Second, there are four studies on the themes of: sharing God's concerns; good neighbours; making disciples; and destroying hostility. Third, there is a longer study on conversation and dialogue.

Please feel free to select the study materials that you think will be of use to your congregation in your context. We suggest that as you use the studies you keep a list of all the different ways for engaging with people of other faiths that come out of your discussion of these passages.

For those who would like a more comprehensive survey of biblical material that relates to those of other faiths (possibly as background reading), we have included an extract from *Embassy, Hospitality & Dialogue*, a report prepared by Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali for the 1998 Lambeth Conference.

### Section Contents

- 1.1 Encounters with Jesus and Paul
- 1.2 Sharing God's concerns
- 1.3 Good Neighbours
- 1.4 Making disciples
- 1.5 Destroying hostility
- 1.6 Dialogue and conversation
- 1.7 Embassy, hospitality and dialogue





## 1.1 Encounters with Jesus and Paul

### 1.1.1 Jesus

*Jesus' encounters with Gentiles were encounters with people of other faiths and by studying these encounters we can explore Jesus' approach to those of other faiths.*

*Read John 4: 1 – 41. Jesus doesn't preach at the Samaritan woman but uses an everyday encounter to engage her in conversation.*

1. What everyday encounters do you have with people of other faiths and how could these become opportunities for conversations? Do you think conversations can be a useful means of engaging with people of other faiths and why?

*This story reflects understanding both of the cultural and religious boundaries between Jews and Samaritans (John 4: 9 & 10) and of aspects of Samaritan beliefs (John 4: 19 - 24).*

2. Why do you think it is important to understand something of the beliefs and practices of other faith communities before engaging with them?

*Jesus crosses cultural and religious boundaries in order to speak with the Samaritan woman (John 4: 9).*

3. Do you think Jesus understood the cultural/religious boundary he was crossing and if so why did he choose to do that? What are the implications of Jesus' action for us?

*In John 4: 19 – 26 the Samaritan woman and Jesus discuss aspects of their religious beliefs.*

4. What does Jesus say about the woman's faith and his faith? Does he say that she is wrong to believe as she does or does he take a different approach to her faith?

*Read Matthew 15: 21 – 28 and Luke 7: 1 - 10. In both these stories Jesus recognises great faith in someone of another faith (the Canaanite woman and the Roman Officer) and responds to that faith by healing the daughter and servant.*

5. How can we respond positively and compassionately to the faith of others? How might we expect to be challenged and encouraged by the faith of those who have another Faith?



## 1.1.2 Paul

Paul had a multi-cultural upbringing. He was born and grew up in Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 21: 39), a city noted for its Stoic philosophers. From other sources it seems likely that Paul's parents were carried off as prisoners of war from the Judean town of Gischala to Tarsus. Presumably enslaved to a Roman, they were freed and granted Roman citizenship which was then also passed to Paul. In Tarsus Paul would probably have had an education in Greek culture before going to Jerusalem at about the age of 12 to study under the famous rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22: 3).

1. Many of us will also have a range of multi-cultural backgrounds and experiences. Spend a few moments sharing your personal experiences and their effect on you.

*In his ministry, Paul visited the worship places of other faiths (Acts 17: 23), quoted from the writings of other faiths (Acts 17: 28; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Titus 1:12)<sup>1</sup>, and used rhetorical approaches learnt from Greek oratory.*

2. How could our personal multi-cultural experiences together with visits to other worship places and reading of the writings of people from other faiths help us in our engagement with people of other faiths?

*Read 1 Corinthians 9: 19-23 and reflect on Paul's strategy for making disciples.*

3. In the light of your discussion of Questions 1 and 2, what did it mean for Paul to become 'like a Jew' or 'like one under the law' or 'like one not having the law'? What might it mean for us to become 'like a Jew' or 'like a Muslim' or 'like a Sikh'?

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<sup>1</sup> In his famous Areopagus speech before Stoics and Epicureans at Athens, Paul quoted from Aratus's *Phaenomena* 5 (Acts 17:28), "We are also his offspring." In 1 Corinthians 15:33 Paul cited from Menander's play *Thais*, the line, "Bad company is the ruin of good character." In Titus 1:12 Epimenedes' *De Oraculis* is cited: "The Cretans, always liars, vicious brutes, and lazy gluttons."



## **1.2 Sharing God's concerns**

*Read Jonah 4: 10 & 11 and discuss the following question based on your understanding of the passage:*

1. Why does the Bible contain a story which is about God's concern for people of another faith who were the enemies of the Israelites?
2. What might God want to say to us about our approach to people of other faiths through this story?

*Read Amos 9: 7 and discuss the following question based on your understanding of the passage:*

3. In this verse God says that he has achieved an exodus not just for the Israelites but also for the Philistines and the Arameans. What would this have said to the Israelites about the way in which God was at work in other people with other faiths?

*Read Isaiah 19: 19-25 and discuss the following question based on your understanding of the passage:*

4. In this passage God says that he will send a Saviour to the Egyptian people whom he also calls 'his people'. What would this have said to the Israelites about the way in which God was at work in other people with other faiths?
5. In what ways do you think God may be at work in people of other faiths?

## **1.3 Good Neighbours**

*Read Luke 10: 25-37 and discuss the following questions based on your understanding of this passage:*

1. Who are our neighbours?
2. How can we be good neighbours to people of other faiths?
3. How can we love our neighbours from other faiths as we love ourselves?
4. In Jesus' parable it is the person from another faith (the Samaritan) who is a good neighbour to the person from God's chosen people. What could we receive from our neighbours who follow other faiths? How open to this possibility are we?



## 1.4 Making disciples

Read Matthew 28: 16-20 and discuss the following question based on your understanding of the passage:

1. Jesus' command is for his disciples to make disciples of all nations (which necessarily includes people of other faiths). What does it mean to be a disciple? What might it mean for a person of another faith to be a disciple?

Read 1 Corinthians 9: 19-23 and reflect on Paul's strategy for making disciples.

2. What did it mean for Paul to become 'like a Jew' or 'like one under the law' or 'like one not having the law'? What might it mean for us to become 'like a Jew' or 'like a Muslim' or 'like a Sikh'?

Read the following extract from the Inter Faith Network for the UK's Code of Conduct and discuss why the points they make are important in talking to people of other faiths about our Christian faith:

"All of us want others to understand and respect our views. Some people will also want to persuade others to join their faith. In a multi faith society where this is permitted, the attempt should always be characterised by self-restraint and a concern for the other's freedom and dignity. This means:

- respecting another person's expressed wish to be left alone;
- avoiding imposing ourselves and our views on individuals or communities who are in vulnerable situations in ways which exploit these;
- being sensitive and courteous;
- avoiding violent action or language, threats, manipulation, improper inducements, or the misuse of any kind of power; and
- respecting the right of others to disagree with us."

The World Council of Churches' in its Guidelines on Dialogue (Geneva WCC, 1979, p.11) has said:

"... We do not see dialogue and the giving of witness as standing in any contradiction to one another. Indeed, as Christians enter dialogue with their commitment to Jesus Christ, time and again the relationship of dialogue gives opportunity for authentic witness. Thus, to the member Churches of the WCC we feel able, with integrity, to commend the way of dialogue as one in which Jesus Christ can be confessed in the world today; at the same time, we feel able, with integrity, to assure our partners in dialogue that we come not as manipulators but as fellow pilgrims, to speak with them of what we believe God to have done in Jesus Christ who has gone before us, but whom we seek to meet anew in dialogue."



The Global Ethic project<sup>2</sup> has the basic conviction that there can be:

- No peace among the nations without peace among the religions.
  - No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions.
  - No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundations of the religions.
3. How can we be in dialogue with people of other faiths and witness to the distinctiveness of our Christian faith?

## 1.5 Destroying hostility

*Read Ephesians 2: 11-22 and Galatians 2: 11-16 and reflect on the fact that the Gentiles were people of other (pagan) faiths to the Jews. At this point in the history of the Jewish people and the Early Church the requirements of the Law were being used by some to create barriers between God's people and those of other faiths. Through insistence on particular practices like circumcision there was a dividing wall of hostility between the two groups.*

1. The requirements of the Law like circumcision were being used to exclude people of other faiths from becoming God's chosen people. Miroslav Volf has written, "what is exclusionary are the impenetrable barriers that prevent a creative encounter with the other." How do we create barriers or walls of hostility between people of different faiths today?
2. How has the dividing wall of hostility between God's chosen people and people of other faiths been destroyed?
3. What opportunities now exist for God's chosen people and people of other faiths because the dividing wall of hostility has been destroyed?
4. How is peace and reconciliation to be achieved?

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<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.weltethos.org/dat-english/index.htm>. The question of a Global Ethic stems from Professor Hans Küng's book "Global Responsibility" (1990).



## 1.6 Dialogue and conversation

Jesus says in John 8: 28 that he speaks just what the Father has taught him and in John 11: 42 that the Father always hears him. These two verses indicate that Jesus and the Father are in a constant dialogue or conversation. Stephen Verney called this the 'Dance of Love', into which we are invited to enter:

““I can do nothing”, [Jesus] said, “except what I see the Father doing”. If he lays aside his teaching robes and washes the feet of the learners ... it is because he sees his Father doing it. God, the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, is like that; he too lays aside his dignity and status as a teacher. He does not try to force his objective truth into our thick heads, but he gives himself to us in acts of humble service; he laughs with us and weeps with us, and he invites us to know him in our hearts through an interaction and an interplay between us. It is this knowledge that Jesus has received from the Father, and in the to and fro of this relationship he and the Father are one. They need each other. That is the pattern of how things potentially are in the universe, and of how God means them to be”.<sup>3</sup>

Mike Riddell has noted therefore that “Jesus represents the essence of God’s desire to communicate with humanity.” Jesus is “the self-communication of God.”<sup>4</sup> This is why he is ‘the Word of God’ and is why Erasmus, in his 1516 translation of the New Testament, translated ‘logos’ as ‘Conversation’ not ‘Word’:

“It all arose out of a conversation, conversation within God, in fact the conversation was God. So God started the discussion, and everything came out of this, and nothing happened without consultation.

This was the life, life that was the light of men, shining in the darkness, a darkness which neither understood nor quenched its creativity.

John, a man sent by God, came to remind people about the nature of the light so that they would observe. He was not the subject under discussion, but the bearer of an invitation to join in.

The subject of the conversation, the original light, came into the world, the world that had arisen out of his willingness to converse. He fleshed out the words but the world did not understand. He came to those who knew the language, but they did not respond. Those who did became a new creation (his children). They read the signs and responded.

These children were born out of sharing in the creative activity of God. They heard the conversation still going on, here, now, and took part, discovering a new way of being people.

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<sup>3</sup> S. Verney, *The Dance of Love*, London: Fount Paperbacks, 1989, p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> M. Riddell, *God’s home page*, Oxford: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 1998, p.42.



To be invited to share in a conversation about the nature of life was for them, a glorious opportunity not to be missed.” (John 1: 1-14 revisited)<sup>5</sup>

The Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, notes that conversations with God characterise the relationships of those closest to him:

“Abraham says: God, why did you abandon the world? God says to Abraham: Why did you abandon Me? And there then begins that dialogue between Heaven and Earth which has not ceased in 4,000 years. That dialogue in which God and Man find one another.”

“Only thus,” Sacks says, “can we understand the great dialogues between God and Abraham and Moses and Jeremiah and Job.”<sup>6</sup>

1. What conversations with God do you recall from the pages of scripture?

Walter Brueggemann suggests that the Bible has both “a central direction and a rich diversity” which means “that not all parts will cohere or agree” although it has a “central agenda.”<sup>7</sup> The Bible is, therefore, structured like a good conversation with a central thread but many topics and diversions. Brueggemann emphasises that “the Bible is not an “object” for us to study but a *partner with whom we may dialogue.*” In the image of God, he says, “we are meant for the kind of dialogue in which we are each time nurtured and called into question by the dialogue partner.” It is the task of Christian maturing, he argues, “to become more fully dialogical, to be more fully available to and responsive to the dialogue partner”:

“... the Bible is not a closed object but a dialogue partner whom we must address but who also takes us seriously. We may analyze, but we must also listen and expect to be addressed. We listen to have our identity given to us, our present way called into question, and our future promised to us.”<sup>8</sup>

2. In what ways are you in a dialogue with the Bible?

Drawing on the philosophical thought of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, Rowan Williams has written that, “all human identity is constructed through conversations, in one way or another.”<sup>9</sup> First, we have to become aware of someone other than ourselves. Jonathan Sacks says, “we must learn to listen and be prepared to be surprised by others ... make ourselves open to their stories, which may profoundly conflict with ours ... we must learn the art of conversation, from which truth emerges ... by the ... process of letting our world be enlarged by the presence of others who think, act, and interpret reality in ways radically different from our own.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Clive Scott, ‘John 1: 1-14 revisited’ from *Time to Talk of God*, The Methodist Church, 2005, p.81.

<sup>6</sup> J. Sacks, ‘Judaism, Justice and Tragedy – Confronting the problem of evil – 6 November 2000’.

<sup>7</sup> W. Brueggemann, *The Bible makes sense*, St Mary’s Press, 2001, p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p.96-97.

<sup>9</sup> R. Williams, *Christ On Trial: How The Gospel Unsettles Our Judgement*, London: Fount, 2000, p. 138.

<sup>10</sup> J. Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, Continuum, 2002, p.23.



Second, by these conversations we become aware of ourselves. As people, we are not autonomous constructions. Instead, our individual identities are gifted to us by the people, events, stories and histories that we encounter as we go through life. If there was no one and nothing outside of ourselves we would have no reference points in life, no way of knowing what is unique and special about ourselves. In conversations we become aware of how we differ from others and therefore what is unique about ourselves.

Finally, in conversations we also become aware of what we have in common with others. Conversation is something that you can only do with someone else. Therefore, Charles Taylor has argued that, opening a conversation is to inaugurate a common action. A conversation is 'our' action, something we are both involved in together. In this way, conversation reminds us of those things that "we *can only* value or enjoy together" and is, as Rowan Williams has said, "an acknowledgement that someone else's welfare is actually *constitutive* of my own."<sup>11</sup>

3. Can you think of conversations in which you have become more aware of who you are as a human being?

Recognising the significant changes which have led to religious plurality in our society, the General Synod as long ago as 1981 endorsed the *Four Principles of Inter Faith Dialogue* agreed ecumenically by the British Council of Churches:

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

4. In the light of these ideas which see conversation/dialogue as a way of Christian life, what might be the benefits to us of being in a dialogue with people of other faiths?

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<sup>11</sup> R. Williams, *Lost Icons*, Morehouse Publishing, 2000, pp.76 & 77.





## **1.7 Embassy, hospitality & dialogue: *Christians & people of other faiths***

It is quite possible to acknowledge that God has revealed himself in the natural world (Acts 14:17), in people's consciences (Romans 2:15) and even in their religiosity, however far removed that may seem from a Judeo-Christian point of view (Acts 17:22-31). At the same time, it is also possible to hold that we can recognise God's revelation in these other ways precisely because he has revealed himself definitively in the call, the liberation and the history of his chosen people and, supremely, of course, in the living, the dying and the rising again of Jesus of Nazareth. This history of God's judgement, as well as of his salvation, is the canon or the touchstone by which we are able to recognise God's revelation in other ways. As Bishop John Robinson once put it, to say that God is best defined by Christ is not to say that he is confined to Christ.<sup>12</sup>

### **What Does the Bible Say?**

The Bible, as a record of God's dealings with the people of Israel, is mainly concerned, of course, with the experience of God's judgement and salvation among that people. It also has, however, a unique sense of the universality of Israel's God. Here is not mere tribal deity. The God of Israel is the Creator of Heaven and Earth and all that there is in them. He is the Creator of all the nations upon earth and is the directing force in their destinies. The election of Israel means, therefore, that God's purposes for all are especially focused and highlighted in Israel. The world, not Israel alone, is the stage of God's action.

The Bible is a very complex and very diverse collection of documents which were originally composed for different reasons in a variety of contexts, cultures and languages. Although there is an underlying unity, there is also a great variety in the Bible's response to many questions, including that of relations with people of other faiths.<sup>13</sup>

Not all religion is good and in the Bible there are some negative responses to bad religion. Those working on the sociology of the Bible tell us that early Israel was a "flat", non-hierarchical and egalitarian society. This was certainly because of their experience of God who had so dramatically freed them from slavery in Egypt, revealed his will for them in the desert and welded them into a nation during their years of wandering. When they entered Canaan, they encountered an oppressive and hierarchical society in which throne and temple collaborated. The defeat and destruction of the Canaanite city-states, at the time of the conquest, is seen as God's judgement on them. Equally, Israel is judged when she emulated their behaviour.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> J. A. T. Robinson, *Truth is Two-Eyed* London, SCM, 1979, P. 129 (quoting Sloane Coffin).

<sup>13</sup> J. Goldingay, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament* Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1987.

<sup>14</sup> See further W. Brueggemann, *Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel* JBL, 1979, No. 98 PP. 161-85. Also M.H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua* Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 1981, PP. 37 f.



Elijah's encounter with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings:18) is the climax of a long running hostility in the Bible to the sexually permissive, even licentious, cult of the god Baal (of whom there were many local variants). Once again, such a negative response was needed if the moral fibre of the nation was not to be completely destroyed. After the Exile, there is the example of Ezra and Nehemiah refusing help for the rebuilding of the temple from those they perceived to have compromised themselves and attempting to purify the nation. In both of these responses there is a fear of syncretism; that the pure worship of God would somehow be mingled with beliefs and practices which were not consonant with the revelation received by the Jewish people.

These negative responses are there in the biblical material. They may have arisen because of an encounter with inauthentic, destructive or tyrannical religion. They could also have come about because of misunderstandings, political and military rivalry and just plain greed for land.

There are, however, positive approaches to those of other faiths as well. Consider the Canaanites, for instance. On the one hand, there is the rejection of an oppressive system based on elitism; on the other, there is gradual assimilation of Canaanite and other cultures and, in particular, their religious symbolism. Any fair reading of the account of the building of Solomon's temple will show the extent of such influence (1 Kings:69). The very building of the temple, and the placing of the ark in it, indicated a significant shift in Israel from being desert nomads to being a settled people like their neighbours.

A more positive relationship with the Canaanites is anticipated already in the Patriarchal narratives, in the story of Melchisedek, King of Salem, encountering Abraham, father of all the faithful. The story, as it has come to us, has been reflected on and redacted. Yet what we have clearly is a Canaanite priest-king, a symbol of all that early Israel was concerned to reject, bringing bread and wine to Abraham. We are then told that Abraham makes him an offering in recognition of this priestly service! Von Rad captures the element of surprise very well when he says, "Melchisedek, in his veneration of 'God most High, maker of heaven and earth,' came close to believing in the one God of the world, whom Israel alone knew. This is surely the sense of the passage ... Such a positive, tolerant evaluation of a Canaanite cult outside Israel is unparalleled in the Old Testament." He points out that the Melchisedek motif is related to the throne of David in Psalm 110. In the Christian tradition, this gives rise to reflection on the priesthood of Christ himself which is seen as being "according to the order of Melchisedek" (Hebrews 6:20 ff.)<sup>15</sup>

Then there is the strange story of Balaam, the Mesopotamian prophet who is made to prophesy for Israel in the presence of their enemies (Numbers 22-24). Was Balaam a saint or a sinner? In other parts of the Bible, he is shown in a very bad light and comes to a very sticky end (Numbers 31:8, Deuteronomy 23:4-5, 2 Peter 2:15, Jude 11, Revelation 2:14). Nothing can detract, however, from the fact that he was inspired by God's Spirit and prophesied in an authentic way.

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<sup>15</sup> See G. von Rad's commentary on *Genesis* London, SCM, 1972, pp. 179 f.



In more political terms, there is Cyrus, who is called the Lord's anointed (or messiah!) to bring liberation to his people (Isaiah 45:1-6). In the Pentateuchal and Historical Books there are other incidents, such as the meeting between Elisha and Naaman (2 Kings:5), which suggests a certain amount of tolerance and friendly inter-action.

It is, however, in the writing of the Prophets that a more adequate theology of God's purposes for all people is being worked out. The Prophets tell us of how God has done this in the past, how he is doing it in the present and what he is to do in the future. Amos, for instance, declares that God has a purpose for and acts within the history of the various nations, both far and near. The language of the Exodus from Egypt is, moreover, used to describe God's "saving plan" for these peoples (Amos 9:7). From the very beginning, God has worked in this way even if people have been unaware of it.<sup>16</sup>

Malachi, on the other hand, speaks of the ways in which God is recognised and worshipped, however inadequately, among the nations. In some cases, in ways that are worthier than the worship of Israel itself (Malachi 1:11). From the earliest times, attempts have been made to understand the text as referring to the future (in the Early Church the verse was regarded as a prophecy of the Eucharist). Even some Bible translations try to translate the verse as future but the plain sense seems to be that the prophet is referring to events that are contemporaneous with his activity.<sup>17</sup> In both Isaiah 19 and in the so-called Apocalypse of Isaiah (Chapters 24-27) there is a reference to a blessed community of nations. God's blessing no longer applies solely to Israel, the other nations are also blessed. Israel is the primary recipient of this blessing and also God's instrument in extending it to others. Otto Kaiser comments, "To the extent to which people of different nations and religions are forced to become acquainted with each other and to live together, human relationships are set up which cannot and ought not to be ignored by an understanding of faith which is honest with itself."<sup>18</sup> There is a reference here to the context in which the prophecy first arose, but there is also anticipation of a future which belongs to God.

Among the prophets there are different models of how God is fulfilling his purposes among the various people. There is, for example, the centripetal model where the nations all stream to Mount Zion to join in the Jewish cult (Isaiah 2: 1-4, Micah 4: 1-4). It has often been a temptation for the People of God, both Jewish and Christians, to think like that: God's purpose for the nations must be that they should become exactly like us! We have, however, seen already that God is working his purposes out in a variety of ways and that no one model is adequate in describing God's work.

Against the "exclusion" of Ezra and Nehemiah, we have the more "inclusive" approach of books such as Ruth, Jonah and Job. The ancient story of Ruth tells of how a Moabite woman became the ancestress of David and thus of the Messiah himself (Ruth 4:17-22, Matthew, 1:5, Luke 3:32). The Book of Job is not only located in the Arabian region but has many words of Arabic origin and Job himself is not, of course, a Jew but very probably an Arab. This echoes Jesus' reminder to the people of his home town that Elijah was sent to a widow in

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<sup>16</sup> See further J. Alberto Soggin, *The Prophet Amos* London, SCM, 1987, pp. 142.

<sup>17</sup> For an extended discussion see J. G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* London, Tyndale, 1972, pp. 227 ff.

<sup>18</sup> O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-19* London, SCM, 1974, pp. 111.



Zarephath, even though there were many widows in Israel, and that Elisha healed only Naaman the Syrian, even though there were many lepers in Israel at the time (Luke 4:24-27).

The universalism of the New Testament arises out of the response to the Gospel by the poor, the marginalised and the foreigners. We are told that the common people (ochlos) heard Jesus gladly (Mark 12:37). He keeps company with the sinners and outcasts of society (Matthew 9:10-13). Foreigners respond positively to the words and works of Jesus (Matthew 8:1-13, Mark 7:24-30, Luke 17:11-19, John 12:20-21). This is confirmed in the experience of the Early Church which is alerted to its world wide mission by the response of those either on the margins of the synagogue or outside it altogether (Acts 13:44-48).<sup>19</sup>

### **Criteria and Basis for Dialogue**

Why should Christians engage in dialogue with people of other faiths? Both Scripture and our experience provide criteria that God is working in the cultures and histories of all people. In different ways, people respond to this divine impulse and the Bible, as the inspired record of God's saving acts, provides us with a means of discerning how God has been working in the history, the culture and the spirituality of a particular people. Awareness of the divine need not be confined to the structures of institutional religion. Indeed, it may not be found there at all! It can be a very private affair and sometimes it may be found in counter-religious movements which set out to affirm human dignity and equality and which challenge oppressive social institutions.

### **The Trinity and Dialogue**

Our basis for dialogue should be Trinitarian. We enter into dialogue because we believe that all men and women have been made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). It is true that this image has been distorted by human sin and rebellion and stands in need of conversion (metanoia) but it has not been destroyed and it is possible for people to recall (anamnesis) something of God's intention for them and for the world even in this state. We may say that this possibility of discerning the signs of God in creation and conscience is the basis for natural theology.

In addition to this possibility, however, there is also general revelation God has not left human beings on their own in trying to interpret the universe. The Logos, the Eternal Word of God, who provides coherence to the universe (makes it a universe), and who is incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, also enlightens the hearts and minds of all human beings (John 1:9). The early Christian apologists identified the Logos with the divine Reason which holds the universe together and which provides order and stability to human societies. Its illumination may be seen in the work of those philosophers who sought to understand the world in a rational way and who taught that it was part of human destiny to use reason as a way of participating in the divine work. Although the poets were seen as obsessed with falsehood, nevertheless there were "sparks of divine Reason" even among them, and the apologists

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<sup>19</sup> J. Stambaugh and D. Balch, *The Social World of the First Christians* op cit, PP. 54 ff.



follow Paul in trying to demonstrate the Christian God from the poetry of their time.

The morality of the Stoics and Platonists is also recognised as reflecting the light of the Eternal Word. Even the famed Sibylline Oracles are seen as witnessing to the truth revealed by Christ. This is not to say that these apologists were indifferent to the distinctiveness of the Christian faith or that they endorsed everything in Gentile religiosity. Far from it, in fact they were very critical of most popular and even philosophical religion. The apologists were, however, recognising the light of Christ wherever they saw it and used it to make their case.

The ubiquity of the Holy Spirit also makes dialogue possible. The Holy Spirit is not only the point of connection (Anknüpfungspunkt) between God and the human being but is also the medium in whom and through whom human beings can communicate with one another regarding matters of ultimate concern.<sup>20</sup>

The Johannine teaching that the Holy Spirit is in the world convincing it of sin, righteousness and judgement has been further developed in Orthodoxy. This is called the economy of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is present everywhere and fills everything, inspiring people in their response to God and to Christ. For the Orthodox, this can include people of other faiths. The Spirit is leading all towards the final consummation, the recapitulation of all things in Christ.<sup>21</sup>

Reformed traditions, too, emphasise the prior work of the Holy Spirit in that renewal and recreation of the human personality which they understand as conversion. Such a view is based on the Pauline teaching that we can discern spiritual matters only because the Spirit is already at work in us (1 Corinthians 2:14-16, 12:3; 2 Corinthians 3:4-6; Ephesians 1:17-20, 3:14-19). In dialogue we must assume then that the Spirit is working to convert people to God. Signs of the Spirit's work will be discerned in their consonance with the Gospel, its teaching and values, but also by the fruit of love, joy and peace. In the same way, all that makes for human flourishing will be seen as a response to the Spirit's impulse and guidance. All that makes for strife, hatred, intolerance and greed is clearly not of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-24). In spite of such criteria for discerning the presence and work of the Spirit, Christians will be surprised at the way in which the Spirit can be manifest and at the places of such manifestation. The spirit blows in sovereignty and freedom. We may catch a glimpse of the work or hear the sound, but we do not fully understand the source (John 3 :8).

### **How Does Dialogue Happen?**

Dialogue happens when people who are neighbours or colleagues begin to talk to each other about their beliefs and spiritual experience. It can happen when people join together to struggle for freedom or human rights and discover that they are doing so because of their faith. Sometimes it comes about because people of different faiths are concerned about the moral and spiritual values influencing the communities in which they live. They discover that

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<sup>20</sup> J. V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God* London, SCM, 1987, PP. 42 f. and 127 f.

<sup>21</sup> G. Khodr, *Christianity in a Pluralistic World - The Economy of the Holy Spirit in The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement* (C. G. Patelos, ed.) Geneva, WCC, PP. 297 ff.



their different faiths both unite and divide them on a number of issues. From time to time people will want just to share spiritual experience with one another. This is yet another form of dialogue.

Representatives of various faiths will sometimes arrange more formal dialogues between the leaders of the different communities or between scholars belonging to these communities. On occasions such dialogues will be limited to a specific issue or a cluster of issues. At other times they may be called to review the whole range of relations between two or more faiths. Dialogue may be bilateral, between representatives of two faith-communities, or multilateral, involving people from a number of such communities. The dialogue of specialists or scholars is very important, as crucial areas of agreement or difference can be clarified in this way. People can discover that their histories and beliefs are not as far apart as they thought and, even if they are, they begin to understand the reasons for the differences a little better. For this to happen, it is vitally important that scholars should share the results of their meetings with the people of their respective communities.<sup>22</sup>

Through careful listening to one another, people begin to understand the cherished beliefs of each side, even if they cannot agree with them. They begin to appreciate the spiritual well-springs which motivate people's actions, even if they cannot endorse them. The German theologian, Hans Kung, in his project on The Religious Situation of Our Time has pointed out that without peace between the religions, there will be war between nations and civilisations and even within nations and civilisations. Peace between religions will only come about as a result of a dialogue between religions and this must be based on a thorough investigation of the foundations of the religions. Indeed, we might say that such an investigation must be part of the dialogue.<sup>23</sup>

In Christian circles an important question that has arisen has to do with the appropriateness of witness in the context of dialogue. Some Christians have shied away from witnessing in a dialogical relationship because of fear that the partner may regard this as an abuse of dialogue and a covert way of proselytising. It is true that dialogue can be abused in this way by Christians as well as people of other faiths. At the same time, it has to be recognised that dialogue would not be authentic if people did not give an account of how their faith sustains and motivates them, how it comforts them at times of trial or sorrow and how it encourages them and gives them hope. Christians will want to listen respectfully and attentively to their partners' witness, but they will also want to witness to what God has done for them in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>22</sup> *Dialogue and Proclamation* Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue. Rome, *The Bulletin*, May 1991, E. J. Sharpe, *The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue* in J. Hick (ed.), *Truth and Dialogue* London, SPCK, 1974, pp. 77 ff.

<sup>23</sup> H. Kung (ed.) *Christianity and the World Religions* London, SCM, 1993, pp. 440 ff, and also his Lambeth Interfaith Lecture, *World Politics and World Ethics as a Challenge to the Churches* November, 1994.



It is, perhaps worth quoting at length a statement from the World Council of Churches' Guidelines on Dialogue:

"...We do not see dialogue and the giving of witness as standing in any contradiction to one another. Indeed, as Christians enter dialogue with their commitment to Jesus Christ, time and again the relationship of dialogue gives opportunity for authentic witness. Thus, to the member Churches of the WCC we feel able, with integrity, to commend the way of dialogue as one in which Jesus Christ can be confessed in the world today; at the same time, we feel able, with integrity, to assure our partners in dialogue that we come not as manipulators but as fellow pilgrims, to speak with them of what we believe God to have done in Jesus Christ who has gone before us, but whom we seek to meet anew in dialogue."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Geneva WCC, 1979, pp. 11. Such thinking is widespread in ecumenical documents and has, more recently, been reaffirmed by the Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland in Christian Identity - Witness and Interfaith Dialogue London, CCB, 1991.



# Section 2

## Who are we engaging with? Faith community beliefs & practices

### Section introduction

This section contains a document describing the beliefs and practices of the eight world religions other than Christianity that are found in the UK. Information is provided on key beliefs and practices. It is not possible to cover the denominational or sectarian differences in each religious tradition within such brief introductions and therefore a health warning is warranted. These sections give helpful generalisations provided assumptions are not made in all cases.

Following these descriptions are eight quiz questions, the answers to which can all be found in the descriptions. The quiz questions are to enable familiarity with the kind of material included in the descriptions and the answers (also included) aim to suggest ways in which this information could be of use. Finally, there are four scenarios for group discussion which aim to show the way in which prior knowledge of faith communities is useful for engagement.

### Section contents

- 2.1 Faith community beliefs & practices
- 2.2 Faith communities quiz
- 2.3 Scenarios for group discussions





## 2.1 Faith community beliefs & practices

Faith communities are groupings of people belonging to the major world religions and of those who follow other forms of religious expression. In the UK, according to Interfaith Network for the UK, there are communities of people following nine of the world religious traditions: Bahá'ís, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and Zoroastrians.

In each of the next eight sections, brief summaries of the above faith traditions except Christianity are provided. Information is provided on key beliefs and practices. It is not possible to cover the denominational or sectarian differences within each religious tradition within such brief introductions and therefore a health warning is warranted. These sections give helpful generalisations provided assumptions are not made in all cases.

### 2.1.1 BAHÁ'ÍS

#### Key beliefs

The Bahá'í Faith was founded by Husayn Ali, known to Bahá'ís as Bahá'u'lláh (Glory of God), in Persia in 1844. It was declared as a new religion, different to Shia Islam practised in Iran. Key Bahá'í beliefs are found in various collections of the talks which 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave. These include:

- One god;
- Unity of Mankind;
- Independent investigation of truth;
- The common foundation of all religions;
- The essential harmony of science and religion;
- Equality of opportunity for men and women;
- Elimination of prejudice of all kinds;
- Universal compulsory education;
- A universal auxiliary language;
- Abolition of extremities of poverty and wealth through international legislation;
- The establishment of universal peace by a world government which will have international courts and military; and
- The concept of progressive revelation.

According to Bahá'í belief the basic purpose of human life is to know, understand and worship God. Bahá'ís believe that everyone has a separate rational soul which, though related to the physical existence, persists after death. This world is seen as the place for developing this soul.

Unity is a central theme of Bahá'í faith. Bahá'ís believe that there has only ever been one religion and one God though people have called Him by different names. Moses, Krishna, Zoroaster, Jesus and Muhammad are all seen as messengers of God. All these messengers are also believed to have promised the coming of a great messenger who would bring peace to the world. Bahá'ís believe that Bahá'u'lláh was that messenger.



A person joins the Bahá'í faith by first becoming a member of the Bahá'í local assembly. The assembly accepts them if it is satisfied that they have truly accepted the tenets of the Bahá'í faith.

### **Key practices**

- *Prayer/Worship:* There are three obligatory daily prayers, of which one must be said. Bahá'ís turn in the direction of Bahji in Israel, which is the burial place of Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'ís are required to perform ritual washing before the obligatory prayer. If water is not available or if there is some reason why water cannot be applied to the hands and the face, the believer may refrain from performing the ablutions provided the verse “In the name of God, the Most Pure, the Most Pure” is recited five times. There are no set worship services, or any priests and there are only seven purpose built Houses of Worship across the world. Most Bahá'í meetings take place in homes. These consist of discussion and prayers, known as Firesides. Access to a prayer room will be sufficient to meet the needs of a Bahá'í wishing to pray during their working hours.
- *Fasting:* The Bahá'í month of 'Alá, 2nd – 21st March, is the fasting period. Bahá'ís abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset during this period.
- *Diet:* There are no specific dietary laws although it is recommended to be vegetarians. Alcohol is strictly prohibited, as are any addictive drugs. Smoking is discouraged.
- *Greetings & Etiquette:* The style of greeting would be whatever is considered normal in a given culture. Some Bahá'ís might shake hands, others might bow, others might hug close friends. Often Bahá'ís will greet each other by saying “Allah-u-Abha”.

## **2.1.2 BUDDHISM**

### **Key beliefs**

This is the way of life for the people who follow the teachings of Buddha. He is worshipped not as a God, but as the Founder of a Way of Life. Buddha is believed to have found the middle way between luxuries and asceticism, called the Eightfold Path to enlightenment, thus, the faith symbol of an eight-spoked wheel. The eightfold path comprises of:

- Right Understanding;
- Right Aspiration;
- Right Speech;
- Right Action;
- Right Livelihood;
- Right Effort;
- Right Mindfulness; and
- Right Concentration.

The object of following the Eightfold Path is to depart from worldly thinking, which is unwholesome (aksula) and to travel the spiritual road to wholesome thinking and action (kusala). When this happens, craving will cease and the person achieves freedom from the force (karma) that causes rebirth (nirvana). Rebirth happens because craving and desire fuels us to be reborn again and again.



There are also three principles known as the three jewels:

- The Buddha - the historical Buddha and the spiritual ideal of enlightenment;
- The Dharma - the teachings and practices which lead to human enlightenment;
- The Sangha - the spiritual community of the people who are practising the Dharma.

Buddhists believe in reincarnation, and that their actions in this life will affect the quality of the next, they therefore accept all responsibilities for their actions. There is no 'God' to be worshipped, but the act of worship is a way of acknowledging the human ideal.

### **Key practices**

- *Prayer/Worship*: Buddhists will worship wherever they can, although they do meet in temples called Viharas, which is often a room in a large house. The room has only a carpet and cushions, and is otherwise bare. Buddhists can worship anywhere, but it is preferable to provide peace and quiet for meditation and chanting. Private family meditations are commonly undertaken on daily basis.
- *Fasting*: On days of fasting, Buddhists do not eat before 12 noon. Local Buddhists are unlikely to practise fasting on a regular basis. In the west, fasting is practised mostly by monks and nuns.
- *Diet*: Many Buddhists tend to be vegetarians due to the emphasis on avoiding intentional killing of a living being. There are different practices with regard to the eating of meat. For example, whilst many Tibetan Buddhists eat meat, Chinese Zen is strictly vegetarian and in Japanese Zen and Thervada Buddhism, monks and nuns are allowed to eat meat if to the best of their knowledge animal has not been specifically killed for them. Meat is never served in monasteries. In Chinese forms of Buddhism garlic and onions are also avoided as they are thought to create heat in the body, thus making meditation more difficult.
- *Greetings & Etiquette*: In Buddhist countries the normal form of greeting is to place the hands together in a prayerful manner and bow. Buddhists in Western countries normally adopt the usual styles of greeting found there, like shaking hands. There are no religious requirements for particular forms of everyday dress for lay Buddhists but general etiquette is to dress discretely, modestly and unobtrusively.

## **2.1.3 HINDUISM**

### **Key beliefs**

Hinduism is the name given to the religion that originated in India. The word Hindu came about as a mispronunciation of the name of an ancient river in India called 'Sindhu'. Hinduism is often misunderstood to be a polytheist religion (i.e. believing in many almighty Gods and Goddesses). Hinduism is in fact a 'pluralistic' religion that suggests that God can be thought of and approached in a variety of ways. This teaching is central to Hinduism. It emphasises that, as we are all different, the way we will think of and approach the ultimate reality (God) will necessarily be different.

- *Dharma*: The name given to religious pursuits. It can mean 'righteous living'; sometimes it is compared to the 'cohesive force that holds society and civilisation together'. The deeper meaning of the word Dharma is to 'Search for the innermost nature of everything - external and internal'.



- *Concept of God:* Hinduism being a pluralistic religion offers a vast variety of concepts of God. Broadly these can be divided into three categories: God with form and quality; God without form; and God beyond the form and the formless. Hinduism does not say that any one approach is better than another is. The choice depends on the individual.
- *'The Sanctity of life':* This principle of non-violence, called Ahimsa, is central in Hindu teachings. It teaches respect for living things extending into the animal and plant kingdoms. This teaching comes naturally from the philosophy of Hinduism.

Hinduism claims many founders. They are called 'Rishis', which literally means one who has seen God. Hinduism claims that the message of spirituality is refreshed in all times and in all countries again and again by seers called 'Rishis.' Hinduism suggests that as spirituality is an empirical subject, the proponents of spirituality cannot be restricted to ancient times. It puts forward the idea that just as prophets of the past experienced God and offered spiritual teachings to mankind, prophets continue to be born in all ages and in all nations. They continue to refresh the message of spirituality. Many Hindu families will show affinity to some such contemporary figure.

There is a vast range of scriptures. Some, like the Vedas, relate the spiritual experiences of the Rishis and are considered to have a higher authority. Some, like the mythological stories, are called the Puranas and are considered to be secondary. The Bhagavad Gita is considered by most Hindus to be the most authoritative scripture in their religion. This text is a spiritual dialogue given by Krishna and explains the philosophy of Hinduism and how it can be made practical and adopted in daily life.

### **Key practices**

- *Prayer/Worship:* Hinduism teaches that it is the heartfelt love for God that counts more than any strict formal codes that may be adopted in any ritualistic practice. Hence the rules of worship or prayers can vary a great deal from family to family. The prayer that all Hindus consider to be central is called the 'Gayatri'. The Gayatri translates as: "Let us meditate on the glorious effulgence of that supreme being who has created the universe; may she enlighten our hearts and direct our understanding." Yoga is also a form of worship. The word yoga is often associated with postures and physical exercises. However it has a deeper meaning. It means 'Pathway of communing with God through meditation'. Yoga practised as 'a pause' before starting any activity is both interesting and can be a good tool to introduce the idea of self-discipline.
- *Fasting:* Fasting for Hindus is like a vow to avoid certain foods at certain times. These times could be particular days of the week, of the lunar month, and of the year. Hindus fast (particularly women) to show their devotion to a particular deity and for the well being of themselves and their family.
- *Diet:* Many Hindus who come from Gujarat or from Tamil-Nadu may be vegetarian. This means that they do not eat meat, fish or eggs. However cakes or biscuits containing eggs are considered acceptable by most of them. Nowadays quite a few Hindu families residing in the UK (including some families from Gujarat and Tamil Nadu) have adopted meat-eating habits. The only meat they will not consume is beef as the cow is considered to be a sacred animal.
- *Greetings & Etiquette:* "Namaste" is the common Hindu greeting. Hindus traditionally do not shake hands when greeting but do not object to doing so. Hindu men cover



themselves from waste to knee. Most wear western dress for work, but some wear traditional dress. It is not acceptable for a Hindu woman or girl to have uncovered legs. Women wear a Sari, Shalwar-Kamees (loose fitting trousers and long top). Some married women wear a Bindi (red spot) on their forehead, or have a red streak in their hair parting as a sign of being married. There are strong family ties, inviting whole families for dinner and standing together during good and bad times. When washing themselves Hindus prefer to use running water.

## 2.1.4 ISLAM

### Key beliefs

The literal meaning of the word 'Islam' is Peace and Submission. It implies a peaceful way of life based on Submission to the will of God/Allah. The Islamic faith is followed by many Muslims throughout the world, and contains many schools of thought.

The birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is Makkah (Mecca) in Saudi Arabia. The Holy Qur'an is the Book which they believe to be the Divine Revelation from Almighty Allah, the final testament and source of guidance for mankind. The Arabic text was preserved during the life of Prophet Muhammad. Qur'an covers all aspects of life; from history of nations, prophets and ideas to teachings on international relations, worship, economics, politics and personal hygiene.

### Key practices

- *Prayer/Worship*: There are five basic practices known as 5 Pillars:
  - Declaration of faith (SHAHADAH). This is made by verbally pronouncing the words: 'I bear witness that there is no god but God (Allah in Arabic) and that Muhammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), was His prophet and messenger'. Belief in oneness of God is the most important principle of Islam.
  - The mandatory five daily prayers, called Namaz/Salah. Adult Muslims are expected to pray five times each day; before sunrise, at noon, midway between noon and sunset, at sunset and at night. These prayers are obligatory and therefore can be offered anywhere. They are also offered in congregations in all the mosques at set times. Muslims face KABAHA (a cubical building in Makkah built by Prophet Abraham). To ensure the correct direction, Qibla direction finders are available. It is important to offer the facilities for prayer as they may feel that it is too much trouble and not ask. Friday afternoon prayer is the weekly congregational prayer.
  - Fasting during Ramadan (one month of abstaining from food and drink from just before dawn to sunset). Ramadan occurs 11 days earlier each year, and is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Seriously ill, pregnant or breast feeding mothers, menstruating women, people on a journey and elderly people in poor health are exempt from fasting.
  - The giving of alms (ZAKAT).
  - Pilgrimage to Mecca once in life if it is affordable (HAJJ).



- *Diet:* Alcohol, pork and meat of animals not killed in the ritual way are forbidden for Muslims. Animal products such as fat, gelatine and rennet of such animals are also not allowed. Halal (allowed) meat is obtained by slaughtering the animal with the pronouncement of God's name. All vegetarian food is therefore allowed and is the safest and simplest option. Whilst eggs and fish can be eaten, they should not be prepared in an area where pork or other non-Halal meat has been prepared.
- *Greetings & Etiquette:* When two Muslims greet each other they might say "Assalamu Alaikum" (peace be upon you). Modesty discourages physical forms of greeting (kissing, hugging etc), especially between members of the opposite sex. In some Islamic countries, such as Morocco, young men may have close friendships and hold hands in public. You should offer to remove shoes when entering a Muslim home. Muslims are required to follow some modesty rules in their dress, especially, during public meeting and mixing of sexes. Women are required to cover their head, known as Hijab, and wear loose dress. In some traditions women cover their faces too. Many Muslim men grow beards as a religious requirement and some devout ones also keep their heads covered as part of dressing. However it is an individual choice, although they are often worn during prayer. Since Muslims represent many Eastern and African cultures, a lot of cultural clothing is visible.

## 2.1.5 JAINISM

### Key beliefs

In Jain philosophy, time consists of infinite millennia that come and go in cycles of several million years. In the current cycle, 24 Tirthankaras ("builders of the ford", also called Jina) have appeared. Mahavira, a contemporary of the Buddha, was the last Tirthankara or Jina. A Jain is a follower of a Jina.

The principle of Karma, that Jains teach, is that the body inhabited by a soul in its next life is determined primarily by the soul's present actions. The human state is the only one from which moksha (release from the cycle of birth and death) is possible and the teachings of the tirthankaras, therefore, lead humans to spiritual release.

In Jainism, there are five ideal levels of human development toward which asceticism, prayer and practice are directed:

- At the first level are the Arhats (worthy ones), also known as Jinas (great teachers) or tirthankaras (the ford-makers);
- At the second level are the Siddhas (liberated souls) who have destroyed all eight types of karmas;
- Next are teachers, Sādhis (nuns) and Sādhus (monks) who are spiritual leaders;
- Then there are teachers, nuns and monks who instruct other monks and nuns;
- The fifth level is that of ordinary monks.



Over many lifetimes, emancipation from destructive karmic matter can be achieved by Arhats and Siddhas. Most Jains, however, are laypeople whose lifestyles are influenced by the Five Great Vows of Jain Monastics:

- Ahimsa: non-violence and no taking of life including compassion for all living creatures;
- Satya: truth - the renunciation of secular life;
- Achaurya or Asteya: non-stealing;
- Brahmacharya: celibacy and chastity;
- Aparigraha: non-attachment and non-ownership of material goods - greed and the desire to possess material goods entangles and limits human beings. The absence of material goods enables humans to be free in this world and to eventually become free from the endless cycle of birth and death.

The Three Jewels offer a graduated pathway towards moksha which both laypeople and mendicants can follow according to their vows. They are:

- right faith;
- right knowledge; and
- right conduct.

A further principle of Jainism is Anekantvad or multiple viewpoints. Jains think that each person is limited by her/his own perspective and cannot therefore pass judgements or act upon a limited point of view.

### **Key practices**

- *Prayer/Worship*: Jains may worship (puja) at home shrines three times a day – before dawn, at sunset, and at night. They may also worship at temples (mandirs) or, where there is no temple, will meet in homes and halls.
- *Fasting*: On occasion, some Jains will voluntarily undertake tapas (practices of austerity) such as eating only one meal a day or fasting from sunrise to sunset, either for a day or for a week.
- *Diet*: Dairy products such as milk, curd and ghee (clarified butter) are permitted but meat, eggs, butter, root vegetables, figs, honey and alcohol are prohibited. Garlic and onions will also be unacceptable to observant Jains. Jain ascetics do not eat after sunset or before sunrise and some laity also observe these restrictions.
- *Greetings/Etiquette*: Similar to Hinduism. However, Non-violence, the cardinal principle of Jainism effects all aspects of day to day living as Jains avoid any form of physical and mental harm.

## **2.1.6 JUDAISM**

### **Key beliefs**

The Jewish people believe that God made a covenant with Abraham, a promise that he would be their God and they would be his people. The three key elements of Judaism are:

- God: God exists; God is one; God is not in bodily form; God is eternal; God knows the deeds of human beings; God punishes the evil and rewards the good; God will send a Messiah; and God will resurrect the dead.



- Torah: the Torah (Teaching or Direction) is of divine origin; and the Torah is eternally valid.
- Israel: Jews must worship God alone; God has communicated through the prophets; and Moses is the greatest of the prophets.

The Torah contains 613 commandments or mitzvot which are seen as the revelation of God and the basis of the covenantal relationship between God and the people. The tradition is seen as a living one, the interpretation and application of which is collected in the Talmud, which is organised into two parts, the Mishnah and the Gemara. The Mishnah contains prayers and laws and the Gemara comments on, and discusses, the Mishnah. The legal material in the Talmud is known as Halakhah, whilst the non-legal materials are known as the Aggadah. Community life is centred on the interpretation and practice of the Halakhah.

### Key practices

- *Prayers/ Worship:* Three daily prayers are stipulated – Shaharit (morning service), Minhah (afternoon prayers) and Maariv (evening prayers). Communal prayer can take place anywhere and does not need a rabbi to officiate but, in the Orthodox tradition, can only be said when a group of ten or more Jewish males have been convened. Tephilin (phylacteries) are worn for morning prayers. These are two strap-on leather boxes containing parchment sections of the scriptures. Tallitot (traditional prayer shawls) may also be worn. The Shabbat begins about half an hour before sunset on the Friday evening and ends at nightfall on the Saturday night. During Shabbat it is forbidden for Jews to engage in any activities which are considered as work. This general rule has been variously interpreted by different Jewish traditions, e.g. Orthodox Jews may not drive their cars on Shabbat as this entails making a spark in the engine. This is seen as synonymous with starting a fire, which is considered to be work. Progressive Jews do not deem this as work and therefore do drive.
- *Fasting:* Yom Kippur is a day of fasting. A 24 hour fast is observed by devoting to prayer and worship and seeking forgiveness.
- *Diet:* Jewish food regulations are known as kashrut (fitness). Food is either kosher (permitted) or trefe (forbidden). Animals with split hooves which chew the cud, like sheep, cows and deer, are permitted as are birds (excluding birds of prey), if there is a tradition of the bird being kosher. Eggs are kosher if they come from kosher fowl. Eggs with blood spots may not be eaten. Fish with both fins and scales are permitted. All fruit and vegetables are acceptable, as long as they are clear of insects. Food which contains, or has been cooked in, products from non-permitted animals is unacceptable. For meat to be kosher it must have been humanely slaughtered by a shochet (a qualified slaughterer) working under the supervision of the Beth Din (religious court). Kosher foods are marked with a seal (hechsher) to show that they are kosher. Jewish law prohibits the mixing of milk foods with meat foods. Separate sets of kitchen utensils are used for the two types of food and a time lapse is observed between one type of food and the other. Glass (but not Pyrex) can be used for both types of food. Fruit and vegetables are considered parve, neither milk nor meat products and able to be eaten with both. Generally vegetarian food and disposable plates, cups and cutlery are acceptable. However, Orthodox Jews will require separate meals prepared in a kosher





kitchen. There are special food requirements during the festival of Pesach/Passover. A local synagogue should be contacted to obtain details.

- **Greetings & Etiquette:** There are no fixed forms of greeting. Orthodox Jews would not expect overly physical displays of affection between those of the opposite sex. A very Orthodox Jew will not touch any woman other than his wife and immediate family. Orthodox Jewish men wear a skull cap all the time. All Jewish men wear one in the synagogue. Orthodox women wear a wig or have their hair covered outside the home. Liberal Jews may not be distinguishable by any dress code, but they may choose to wear a Star of David.

## 2.1.7 SIKHISM

### Key beliefs

Sikhism originated in the State of Punjab in India some 500 years ago, founded by Guru Nanak. Sikhs believe in one God, and in many cycles or rebirth. They respect equality of all people, regardless of caste, colour, creed or sex.

The one God is known by many names including Ram, Mohan, Gobind, Hari, and others. But two names used in worship are Satnam (the recitation of God's name) and Waheguru (Wonderful Lord).

A Sikh Temple is called a Gurdwara, a place for speaking about God and for public worship. It is a place for meditation, divine knowledge, bliss and tranquillity. Its focal point is the HOLY GRANTH SAHIB (the Sikh Holy Book), wrapped in a costly cloth, and placed on a platform under a canopy. Prayers are read five times each day.

Sikhs believe that an individual should make every effort to overcome anger, greed, pride and passion, and should work hard to earn a decent living. Sikhs recognise three levels of service: physical service, which is being of assistance to those who require help; mental service, which involves enlightening others about God and righteousness; material service, in the form of financial contributions to noble causes. Sikhs are very tolerant of the view of others, seeing all as friends.

### Key practices

- **Prayer/Worship:** Prayers are usually read five times each day. At the Gurdwara, a special sweet (Karah Parshad) is blessed and shared. It is important that if any is brought in for a patient, he/she should be allowed to eat it regardless of any special diet. As an act of faith, baptised Sikhs wear the five K's:
  - **Kesh:** The practice of keeping the hair uncut which is the distinctive sign of Sikh identity. Men tie up their long hair and keep it under a turban. Some women may also choose to wear a turban. Different styles and colours do not have any significance except personal choice. Kesh is treated by Sikhs with utmost respect as it is a symbol of identity and commitment.
  - **Kangha :** A small comb, which is worn in the hair at all times. Though it is used to keep the hair organised and clean, it symbolises orderliness.



- Kara: This is a steel bracelet or ring, worn on the right wrist. Kara is seen as a reminder of the universality of God and a symbol of allegiance to the brotherhood and the Guru.
- Kaccha : A special type of underwear garment (male shorts made from cotton) which is knee length. It is both a symbol of readiness to be a combatant to protect the weak and oppressed as well as of modesty and moral restraint.
- Kirpan; A short sword or dagger which symbolises the readiness to defend oneself and protect the weak and oppressed.
- *Fasting*: There are no universal fasting requirements. However, some Sikh women may choose to abstain from salt on the day of the full moon for cultural reasons.
- *Diet*: Many Sikhs tend to be vegetarian, and many will not eat fish or eggs, or any products made with these. Any non-vegetarian Sikhs will not eat beef and some will not eat pork. They do not eat Halal meat. It is important to tell people what meat is contained in the various dishes e.g. shepherds pie. Most Sikhs do not smoke or drink alcohol. Only vegetarian food is served in the gurdwaras.
- *Greetings & Etiquette*: When encountering a group of Sikhs it would be normal to begin by greeting the eldest first. Sikhs greet each other by putting their hands together and bowing, in respect for the divine in the other person. There is no objection to shaking hands. Some Sikhs may hug people of their own gender. Sikh families have strong traditions about modesty. Some women veil their faces in the presence of men who are older than their husbands, but this is a cultural variation and not a Sikh requirement. The home is considered holy and you should offer to remove your shoes.

## 2.1.8 ZOROASTRIANISM

### Key beliefs

The founder of Zoroastrianism was the prophet Zarathushtra who lived in Eastern Iran either around 6,000 BCE (Before Common Era) or 1,200 BCE. Zoroaster is the Greek form of Zarathushtra's name. Zarathushtra proclaimed the worship of Ahura Mazda (the Wise Lord or the Lord of Wisdom) who is believed to have created a good world consisting of seven elements of creation: the sky, waters, earth, plants, cattle, humans, and fire.

Zarathushtra saw the world as a theatre of conflict between two opposed mainyus (moral spirits). These are Spenta Mainyu (the Spirit of Goodness) and Angre Mainyu (the Spirit of Evil). They stand for mental attitudes in the psychological domain and opposing moral vectors in all of creation. The world, as created by Ahura Mazda is intrinsically good but contaminated by evil. The ideal form of existence as envisioned by Ahura Mazda is Asha Vahishta (The Highest Truth and Righteousness). Acting in accordance with Asha is the right thing to do. Each human being possesses Vohu-Mana (the quality of the Good-Mind). Vohu-Mana enables human beings to grasp Asha and to see how any aspect of the world deviates from Asha. This is termed good-thought and from this human beings are inspired to perfect the imperfection (good work). The spirit that inclines human beings to move from right conceptions to right actions is Spenta Armaity (the Spirit of Piety/Devotion or Benevolence/Right-Mindedness).



The Zoroastrian trilogy is therefore:

humata - good thoughts;

- hukhta - good words; and
- hvarshta - good deeds.

Zoroastrians are urged to live life to the full and to enjoy the good creation. Zoroastrians, who believe that Ahura Mazda made the whole of the material world, including plants and animals, have always been very environmentally conscious. Fasting and celibacy are seen as weakening human beings and lessening their power to struggle against evil and as rejecting the divine gift of the good life. Moderation is encouraged. Zoroastrian ethics enjoin an active, industrious, honest and charitable life.

In the social world, the consequence of right actions is Khshathra Vairya (The Ideal Dominion), another divine aspect which means the ideal society or the Kingdom of Heaven. The individual who lives this way of life reaches a state of well-being (of psychic and spiritual integrity) which is called Haurvatat. On dying, such a person enters a state of immortal bliss known as Ameretat. Classical Zoroastrian belief awaited the coming of the Saoshyant (Saviour) to raise the dead for judgement, following which the world would return to its original perfection. This is known as the Frasho-keriti (Making Wonderful) Initiation.

### Key practices

- *Prayer/Worship*: Zoroastrians will prepare for prayer by washing their hands, face and other uncovered parts of their body. The kushti will be untied and held before a source of light (sun, fire or artificial light). Two prayers, the Ashem Vohu and the Ahunavar, are said. For this, a prayer room will be required. For devotions, Zoroastrians divide the day into five gah (times):
  - Havan: from sunrise to noon;
  - Rapithwan: from noon to 3.00 pm;
  - Uziren: from 3.00 pm to sunset;
  - Aiwisruthrem: from sunset to midnight;
  - Ushahen: from midnight to sunrise.
- *Diet*: There are no dietary requirements for Zoroastrians although, from personal choice or sometimes from deference to the wider religious population of Iran and India, many abstain from pork and beef and some are vegetarian.
- *Greetings & Etiquette*: Zoroastrians are meant to wear at all times the sudreh and kushti:
  - Sudreh: a white sacred shirt made of muslin or cotton which symbolises purity and good deeds; and
  - Kushti: a sacred cord woven from 72 threads of fine lambs wool (symbolising the 72 chapters of the Yasna or Act of Worship) which is worn over the sudreh.



## 2.2 Faith Communities Quiz

1. Are Buddhists followers of God?
2. What is the principle of non-violence in Jainism called?
3. What is the Muslim greeting?
4. Members of which faith community pray the Ashem Vohu and the Ahunavar?
5. How does a person join the Bahá'í faith?
6. What does pluralism mean in Hinduism?
7. What is the focal point of a Gurdwara?
8. In Judaism where is the interpretation and application of the Torah collected?



## Faith Communities Quiz Answers

1. Are Buddhists followers of God?

*Buddhists follow the teachings of Buddha who is worshipped not as a God, but as the Founder of a Way of Life. In an interfaith context it is easy to talk in generalizations like, “we are all followers of God, aren’t we?” Making a statement like that would exclude Buddhists.*

2. What is the principle of non-violence in Jainism called?

*Ahimsa. Discussion of approaches to non-violence could be a point of contact or dialogue with Jains (and with Hindus or Buddhists).*

3. What is the Muslim greeting?

*Assalamu Alaikum (peace be upon you). Is this a greeting we could give or respond to?*

4. Members of which faith community pray the Ashem Vohu and the Ahunavar?

*Zoroastrians. With all faiths it is important to know and respect their religious obligations.*

5. How does a person join the Bahá’í faith?

*By being accepted into a local assembly. Local assemblies are the main point of contact with local Bahá’ís.*

6. What does pluralism mean in Hinduism?

*God can be thought of and approached in a variety of ways. As a result, Hindu’s are likely to respect your chosen faith but may be unhappy with attempts at evangelism arguing that your faith suits you best and their faith suits them best.*

7. What is the focal point of a Gurdwara?

*A Gurdwara’s focal point is the HOLY GRANTH SAHIB (the Sikh Holy Book), which is wrapped in a costly cloth, and placed on a platform under a canopy. Do Sikhs therefore have a respect for the Word of God?*

8. In Judaism where is the interpretation and application of the Torah collected?

*In the Talmud. The tradition is seen as a living one open to interpretation, comment and discussion – all important elements of conversation or dialogue.*



## 2.3 Scenarios for group discussions

Group 1: Imagine that planning permission is being sought to build a super casino in the same road as your church. Also in the same road is a Gurdwara. What might it be useful for you to know about Sikhs and Sikhism before contacting the Gurdwara to discuss the issue of the super casino?

Group 2: Imagine that your church wants to find out more about how the Jewish community celebrates Passover, in order to enhance your own understanding of the Last Supper. What might it be useful for your church to know about your local Jewish community before approaching them to talk about Passover celebrations?

Group 3: Imagine that an Islamic organisation approaches your church wanting to hire your facilities to hold an Islamic Circle. What might it be useful for your church to know about Islam before making a decision on this request?

Group 4: Imagine that your church, which is located in a multi-faith area, wants to go door-to-door with the Jesus video. Volunteers will post the video through doors with a letter saying when they will call again to see whether the householder wants to discuss the video. What might it be useful for your volunteers to know about the faiths that the people they speak to on the doorstep may follow?



# Section 3

## Where are the different faith communities? Faith community locations

### Section introduction

This section simply contains information on locations of faith communities within the UK and guidance to bear in mind when contacting these communities.

### Section contents

- 3.1 Faith community locations and contacts
- 3.2 General guidance
- 3.3 Useful resources
- 3.4 Guidance on etiquette and customs



### 3.1 Faith community locations and contacts

To get information on the locations and size of faith communities in your area use the Parish Statistics found on the Presence and Engagement website at:

<http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/resources.php?4>.

These statistics are drawn from the 2001 Census where 77% of people in England and Wales, 67% in Scotland and 86% in Northern Ireland stated that they had a religion. Around seven out of ten people in England and Wales said they belonged to the Christian faith. After Christianity, Muslims were the next largest religious group, followed by Hindus, Sikhs, Jews and Buddhists. 15% of people in England and Wales said they did not belong to a religion, and nearly 8% did not state their religion. Census 2001 information on religion is available nationally, regionally and by local authority areas and wards.

#### Contact exercise

Open the Parish Statistics file found on the Presence and Engagement website at: <http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/resources.php?4>. You will be able to view a profile of your parish. Use this information to identify key faith communities in your areas. Alternatively, go to the Neighbourhood section of the National Statistics website (<http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk>) and enter your postcode. You will be able to view a profile of the ward in which your organisation is located.

Once you have identified the faith communities you need to consult with, identify key individuals or organisations within these communities who can provide you with contacts for consultation. Use the guidance in this document to help you do this.

Below is more detailed information on each of the faiths:

- **Baha’i:** There are about 6,000 Baha’i followers in the UK. The Bahá’í community is organised on the basis of Spiritual Assemblies. Each Spiritual Assembly, whether local or national, has nine members and elects officers to carry out its work. Contact should, therefore, be made with the secretary of the Local Spiritual Assembly.
- **Buddhism:** There are between 30,000 and 130,000 Buddhists in the UK. There are 134 Buddhist groups with 55 centres. The Buddhist community can be contacted through Buddhist organisations. These include viharas, where monks live; centres with residential communities and voluntary groups which normally meet in the homes of members or private/public premises hired or obtained free of charge.





- **Hinduism:** There are a wide range of Hindu organisations in the UK, from religious, community, welfare, youth and educational to political, economic and international. Jatis are community organisations, each representing a particular occupation. They are good in networking and are concerned with the social welfare activities of their community. Mandirs (Hindu Temples) are usually managed by lay people. A Hindu priest or Pandit is usually concerned with the religious ceremonies and services. Therefore, the Mandir Secretary will be the best contact for partnerships.
- **Islam:** A variety of Muslim organisations may be found amongst Muslim communities in UK. They include mosques, welfare and relief organisations, schools, trusts, educational and economic bodies. There are large national networks as well as regional and local organisations. Mosques are run by management committees or boards of trustees. The religious head in a mosque, known as Imam, is responsible for leading the prayer, teaching and advising. The Imams are generally educated in seminaries in Muslim countries and therefore may not speak English fluently. The mosque secretary or president is the best person to contact. For women and youth, community, social and welfare organisations are more appropriate.
- **Jainism:** Approximately 30,000 people in the UK follow the Jain religion with most being in and around the Greater London area and in Leicester. Other Jain communities are in Coventry, Luton, Manchester, Northampton and Wellingborough. There are four Jain places of worship in England – three in London (Croydon, Kenton and Potters Bar) and one in Leicester. Most Jains in the UK are Shvetambara (white robed) monks and their followers. There are both national and local Jain organisations in the UK known as mandal (circle, samaj (society) or sangh (group or gathering). Contact is best made with the local group secretary, chair or president.
- **Judaism:** The UK's Jewish population is estimated at 300,000 and includes Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jewish communities. The largest concentrations are in the Greater London area, with the largest provincial populations being in Birmingham, Brighton, Liverpool and Southend. Hasidic Jews are concentrated in London and Greater Manchester. Most UK Reform/Liberal Jews live in London, the South of England, Manchester and Leeds. Two-thirds are affiliated to a synagogue, with about 80% belonging to Orthodox synagogues and 20% to Reform and Liberal synagogues. Many synagogues have a committee structure and Committee Secretaries or Executive Directors should be approached as the first point of contact.
- **Sikhism:** Apart from Gurdwaras, there are a whole range of Sikh organisations serving the diverse needs of the community. These include social, cultural, educational, professional and missionary societies, groups and organisations. The Network of Sikh Organisations is a major umbrella body of the community. There are Councils of Sikh Gurdwaras in a number of towns and cities. Gurdwaras can also be contacted directly. Educational, cultural and welfare organisations offer good potential for partnerships.
- **Zoroastrianism:** Although there are small numbers of Zoroastrians elsewhere in Britain and Europe, the headquarters and centre of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of



Europe (Incorporated) in London is the focus for most Zoroastrian activity in the country and contains the only Zoroastrian place of worship in the UK. There are also area groups in some parts of the country and the secretary, chair or president of these groups will be the most appropriate contact for partnerships.

### 3.2 General guidance

- Allow sufficient time for getting hold of your contact and arranging a time to speak or meet.
- Be prepared to persevere in making contact as contact people are often volunteers and may have very busy schedules.
- If phoning, be aware that the phone may be answered by someone who is not fluent in your first language and that you may need to phone back later or ask for an alternative contact number.
- Having made an appointment, check on the day before to confirm whether the person is still available.
- Avoid clashes with religious festivals. Check dates against an up-to-date calendar of Religious Festivals e.g. by using the information which can be found at [www.support4learning.org.uk/shap/index.htm](http://www.support4learning.org.uk/shap/index.htm).
- If arranging a meeting involving representatives of several faith communities look for a 'neutral' venue, i.e. don't use the premises of one faith community.
- If catering for a meeting involving representatives of several faith communities, the simplest approach is to make it vegetarian only and not to provide alcohol. However, account should always be taken of the specific guidance given in the earlier sections of this Toolkit before booking catering.
- If visiting a place of worship ask the host if any particular requirement needs to be observed in terms of dress, conduct or timings. Things to ask about include greetings (generally, don't offer to shake hands unless a hand is proffered first particularly if meeting someone of the opposite gender) and finding out about specific dress codes before you visit (removing shoes, covering head etc.). Ask whether those items you will need (e.g. a headcovering) will be provided or whether you should bring them. Generally, all places of worship are quite open, welcoming and apart from certain times of daily and weekly worship are available.

### 3.3 Useful resources

A useful first point of contact in many areas will be the local inter-faith group or Forum of Faiths. Such groups enable people of different religious traditions to come together to share their views or work together on different projects. *Religions in the UK* lists nearly 100 such groups across the UK. Many of these groups are members of the Inter Faith Network for the UK (<http://www.interfaith.org.uk>). If there is such a group in your area, it may be your best first point of contact as the group's members should be able to open up networks within their own faith community.



Actual contact details for faith communities can be found in the *Religions in the UK* directory. This directory is published every three years by the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby and contains contact details for each of the nine main religions in the UK plus Inter-Faith organisations. The directory can be obtained from The Multi-Faith Centre, The University of Derby, Mickleover, Derby DE3 5GX. Tel: 01332 622 222 ext 2026. Fax: 01332 514 323. Web: [www.multifaithnet.org](http://www.multifaithnet.org).

In some areas a local directory of faith communities will have been produced. Such directories may have been produced by a local authority (see Cindex at <http://cindex.camden.gov.uk/inform/cgi/Search.cgi>), a local project or an inter-faith group (e.g. Waltham Forest Faith Communities Project - <http://www.lbwf.gov.uk/index/community/voluntary-sector-development/faith-communities.htm>). Such directories are often updated every three years. Contact your local library service to find out if there is a directory for your area.

### **3.4 Guidance on etiquette and customs**

Working with people across cultures can be a major source of misunderstanding and conflict. It is very easy to cause unnecessary offence or be offended due to not knowing people's etiquette, customs or codes of behaviour. Below are some general points with regards to cross cultural communication:

- Treat everyone as individuals. Always refer to people by their name and not by status, faith or ethnic group they belong to.
- Celebrate difference by recognising it as strength and not a weakness or a problem.
- Not every member of a cultural group is an expert of their group. There are differences in all groups. Always take time to find out.
- If in doubt ask. Do not assume anything, especially about body language or gestures. It is better to give benefit of doubt than assume wrongly. It is best to confirm the fact.
- Very different meanings can be attributed to people's behaviour in culturally diverse environments. Apart from the need to understand the cultural context in which other person is operating, we need to be sensitive and give benefit of doubt.
- We are also products of our own particular cultures which have conditioned our attitudes and behaviour towards others. For example, in some cultures, it is seen as disrespectful to look directly at an elder person or someone in authority, whereas in western cultures this can be interpreted as shifty or untrustworthy.
- The best way to reduce the risk of misunderstandings is to talk to each other, genuinely explore and try to understand cultural contexts and preferences.



# Section 4

## What could we do to engage? Ideas and case studies

### Section introduction

This section provides ideas and case studies for a range of different ways in which parishes could engage with faith communities. First, there are a series of short stories, taken from the *Presence and Engagement* report, which speak about places of encounter. *Presence and Engagement* says: “Muslims, Sikhs and Hindu people are now parishioners with the happy consequence that the universal is now more than ever encompassed within the local parish.” As you read these stories you might like to think about one story with which you identify and also of one story from your own experience.

Second, there are five Case Studies as examples of positive and practical ways in which some churches have engaged with their local faith communities.

### Section contents

- 4.1 Stories of encounter
- 4.2 Case studies of Christian engagement
  - 4.2.1 *Open Doors International Language School*
  - 4.2.2 *London Citizens*
  - 4.2.3 *The Froud Centre and Islamic Circles*
  - 4.2.4 *London Inter Faith Centre*
  - 4.2.5 *A Rocha*



## 4.1 Stories of encounter from the 'Presence and Engagement' report

These stories illustrate the range of places and situations of encounter with people of other Faiths that are now a normal part of parish life – the wider world of other Faiths has arrived on our doorstep and Muslims, Sikhs and Hindu people are now parishioners with the happy consequence that the universal is now more than ever encompassed within the local parish.

*1. Increasingly local schools (not just the church school) are asking for visits to church as part of the curriculum work. This I am happy to do and enjoy it enormously. The majority of pupils are Muslim.*

Birmingham

*2. A sea of boys from local mainly Muslim High school on a church visit. In a later 'thank you' letter, one said: "I didn't want to go to a Christian church. I found the visit very interesting. I now know that you believe in God too."*

Bradford

*3. The vicar was refused permission to take assembly at the community school because he was told that Muslims are trying to proselytise and would not be able to be excluded if the vicar was allowed to take assemblies.*

Bradford

*4. On our Good Friday March, a Sikh man of middle age placed his hand on the large wooden cross that we carry and walked with us for approximately 300 yards. There is a genuine respect here for the church because of our many links with the community.*

Chelmsford

*5. The Hindu group who provide the Christmas Day dinner for elderly white people. The Islamic group who are volunteering to give homework support in maths, Science and English to our local schools. The local children visiting our churches and showing great interest in what we do and why.*

London

*6. The Gurdwara has replaced the Church as the Established Church. It is they who have the processions and organise the street parties and they are superb. Our church used to fulfil this role 50 years ago. We are utterly irrelevant to their life – they would be ten times our size – but each Faith is well disposed to the other.*

Birmingham

*7. The deceased, 'Mabel', was a woman in her eighties, twice widowed, without children. Mabel had no close relatives living nearby (her only surviving sister lived hundreds of miles away). I did not know her; there was no history of church-going and no contacts with the church: Mabel was a 'nominal' Christian. The person arranging Mabel's funeral was a neighbour. She had cared for Mabel for many years, had welcomed Mabel into her home most days to share the life of her family, had done her shopping and washing and cleaning, and had visited her at least once a day over the last two years that Mabel spent in the local Nursing Home. This lady is a devout Sikh. Her husband, daughters and son are devout Sikhs. Mabel had asked her to arrange her funeral, and had left her instructions about the hymns and some of the other arrangements. The service was to be at the local Crematorium. In planning the Service with the Sikh neighbour I explained the pattern and some of the meaning of the funeral service. She had been in the Girls Brigade of a local church and knew something of Christianity. I also learnt something about the Sikh funeral rituals from her,*



particularly as she had lost her sister and parents-in-law quite recently. She shared some of her pain in bereavement, and her Faith in eternal life with God. She was a delightful person, very fond of Mabel, and a person of deep spirituality. When it came to the funeral, there were very few people attending – one could see that without her and the family, Mabel would have led a very bleak existence indeed. The Sikh family seemed very prayerful and very sorrowful. In conducting the service I found my understanding of some of the funeral prayers transformed, given the profound and gracious service and love which the neighbour and her family had shown to Mabel. I began to see Christ as a universal Saviour in a 'bigger', more inclusive way: one embraces all persons in the mystery of his redemption and the peace of his eternal kingdom.

Birmingham

8. We sold our old church hall to our Muslim friends. They have now built a Mosque and we therefore have a very good working relationship.

Chelmsford

9. Not a story – just an explanatory comment: People from the major Faith traditions regularly come to our church/community centre for all sorts of purposes. We lack the time or the personnel to initiate regular contacts/meetings with the other Faith traditions but relations are cordial.

Coventry

10. When I as a curate went to take a funeral for the son of an old lady who had lived all her life in one street and now had no family left, I asked her who cared for her now. She answered that her neighbours, a young couple with a baby had her for Sunday lunch and brought meals around. He had taken her to register the death and had driven her to and from hospital to visit her son as he was dying. 'They're Muslims by the way, but it's the heart that counts isn't it?' He attended the Christian funeral.

Gloucester

11. This is a small village of 700 people but we host the Ahmedi International community centre visited by fully 25,000 visitors attending their jalsa which puts a great strain on infrastructure.

Guildford

12. Our neighbours are changing again. Ours is a long and complex parish containing a number of different neighbourhoods. We enjoy living alongside our Hindu neighbours, who have brought colour and beauty in their jewellery and sari shops, delicious food, and the celebratory fireworks of Divali for us to share. Our older people have good relationships with their Hindu neighbours who are caring and respectful to the elderly. However, these relationships rarely go beyond polite neighbourliness and there is a particular reticence about asking questions which might deepen such relationships. Younger people have grown up alongside Asian and Black schoolfellows and share their secular culture. Meanwhile our parish has recently welcomed a significant number of Somali Muslims. They are a significant presence on a once very deprived estate and seem very new and alien to the indigenous population. Older people are struggling to adapt to yet another immigrant group and younger people react territorially, and occasionally violently.

Leicester



## 4.2 Case Studies of Christian engagement with other faiths

### 4.2.1 Open Doors International Language School

Nestled on the Devonshire south coast, Plymouth is an unlikely location for a spate of recent racist attacks. Since July 2002, when the Home Office designated Plymouth a dispersal centre for asylum seekers, racial tensions have been running high in the city.

In June 2004, an incident at a secondary school saw a gang of over forty pupils chanting racist abuse at a group of twenty refugee classmates. The pupils were eventually herded into a classroom for their own safety, with several parents withdrawing their children from the school as a result of the incident. "I'm not saying all English people are racist," states 17-year-old Ramazan Mohamed, an Iraqi Kurd who had a football thrown in his face by a local youth after being asked where he came from. "But there are not many asylum seekers and more needs to be done to help us mix with local people here - English lessons, football teams, training courses, that kind of thing."

"As a church, we became aware that there needed to be a bridge for those who had come into the city with little or no education," says Cassie Roberts, a long-serving member of the Waterfront Church in Plymouth. The vision of establishing a language school for those isolated by language and culture began to take shape during her time as an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher at the Plymouth College for Further Education.

While teaching at the college, Cassie realised that many people whose first language was not English were not accessing adult education and social services for personal and cultural reasons. Along with other Christian teachers in Plymouth, she and her husband Russell formed a task group of teachers to look into establishing an independent language school. Plans were for the school to cater for both the increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Plymouth and for existing residents who had never accessed adult education.

In order to be taken seriously by other local agencies, Cassie and her team conducted wide-ranging research into the needs of those in the community whose first language was not English. "We wanted to ensure that the school would provide what they actually needed rather than what we thought they needed," says Cassie. "Our research took us right into the heart of the community as we met with council leaders, local community leaders and a number of different faith groups." The first major breakthrough arrived in May 2001 when a local Christian businessman agreed to take a step of faith, purchasing the building where the school would be located.

In February 2002, the Open Doors International Language School was officially opened and began providing language tuition for refugees and asylum seekers and others isolated in the city. The school was able to provide tuition free-of-charge, but only after Cassie and her husband had re-mortgaged their house to provide the initial funding for the project. "We had no money for publicity and had to rely almost entirely on word of mouth in the first few



months,” recalls Cassie. Despite these early challenges, the faith and dedication of the Open Doors team was rewarded when 46 learners enrolled during the first term.

In the first year, the school developed partnerships with more than 30 local agencies including Jobcentre Plus and the Devon and Cornwall Refugee Council. At present, the project receives 60% of its funding from the Learning and Skills Council, a sign of the credibility the project has gained with secular agencies in the area. The school also operates as a social enterprise, running moderately priced language and self-employment courses for the wider community and for students.

Although there are no crucifixes on the walls or Bible verses on the promotional literature, at the heart of this remarkable project is a distinctively Christian ethos that values prayer and the involvement of local churches. “Prayer was the foundation for Open Doors and it continues to be central to our work on a daily basis,” explains Cassie. “We want to create an atmosphere where God’s love is evidenced through our words and our actions.”

Their approach appears to be working. More than 80% of learners at Open Doors come from a Muslim background, thrusting the independent language school into the forefront of Muslim-Christian relations in the coastal town. “Local Imams come here to study English,” Cassie remarks. “It shows just how much trust we’ve built with the Muslim community.”

Cassie believes that this bond of trust has been strengthened further since the events of 7/7. According to her, since the bombings “it’s definitely been easier for us to have open discussions about faith – the differences as well as the similarities. We now have a better understanding of where Muslims are coming from and vice-versa, I hope.”

(See News at: <http://www.faithworks.info/>)

#### **4.2.2 London Citizens**

London Citizens is an alliance of faith congregations and community groups, working together for social change.

When a church joins London Citizens the first activity is an internal one: to build a ‘relational culture’ within the congregation. Grassroots leaders are identified with the skills and passion to reach out to others. This achieved done through a programme housegroups, discussions after worship, and - centrally – ‘one-to-one’ relational meetings. Once potential leaders have been identified training is provided by London Citizens’ paid staff. A similar process would go on in a new member from any faith - although each is informed by a distinctive understandings of community and relationship. Theological themes such as the treatment of neighbours in Scripture and the doctrine of the Trinity are central to developing relational culture in a church. Doing this is seen both as an end in itself, and as a way of finding out what a community needs.





The specific issues that London Citizens acts on will arise from the housegroups, discussions and 'one-to-ones', and potential leaders for actions also emerge through this process. The next stage is to move to external conversations: discussing an area's needs and potential with a group drawn from the diverse range of local members of London Citizens. As well as identifying areas of concern, the aim is to identify possible solutions, and to engage those with the responsibility and authority to make them happen.

At the moment, three London-wide actions are being undertaken by the alliance: a campaign for a 'Living Wage' for those on low pay; the 'Strangers into Citizens' campaign for an earned amnesty for migrant workers, and the campaign for an ethical Olympics. The last of these is described below.

Members of London Citizens were initially sceptical of the Olympic bid process - experience over several months leading to a suspicion that the aim was to 'tick the box' of community support, whilst key decisions were made elsewhere. East and South Londoners had experience of large-scale projects such as Canary Wharf and the Millennium Dome attracting huge Government funding, without always delivering the promised local benefit. Consequently, London Citizens evolved a set of 'People's Guarantees' - a Living Wage for all who worked on the Olympics and their preparations; a local labour clause with training opportunities; and the earmarking of much Olympic accommodation for social housing after the Games. (The 'Living Wage' figure, for a decent standard of living in London, was initially set by researchers commissioned by London Citizens, and is now revised annually by a unit in City Hall.)

These proposals were communicated to the 2012 bid committee, and it was felt that only a 'holding' response was being made. To elicit a clearer answer, a team of London Citizens leaders engaged the bid leader, Lord Coe, at a community consultation in July 2004. Muslim student Ali Babatunde spoke on behalf of the group, making clear that the alliance's support would depend on a clear and positive response to the Guarantees. In November, an agreement was publicly signed by Lord Coe, Mayor Livingstone and Gregory Nichols (a sixth-former at a Catholic school in London Citizens), addressing all the key issues. London Citizens had argued that the bid's prospects with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) would be strengthened by being clearly shaped and owned by local people. The bid committee eventually accepted the force of this analysis. When the IOC visited East London, the group of four community leaders they met were three Borough Council Leaders - and Gregory Nichols.

A team of London Citizens' leaders continues to monitor the delivery of the Guarantees. The Olympic Delivery Agency (ODA) was held to account last November at an assembly of over 1000 members of London Citizens' eastern chapter, TELCO (The East London Communities Organisation). A particular cause of concern was perceived 'foot dragging' on the implementation of the Living Wage. The ODA assured the assembly that workers thus far employed - both directly, and through subcontractors - were on or above the figure. Sustained action by TELCO's member communities has now secured a stronger commitment by ODA to deliver such a wage for the many jobs yet to be advertised and filled.



Christians involved in London Citizens value both the relationships it builds across faiths, and the ways those faiths can then have an impact on shaping the future of their neighbourhoods and city.

*The greatest benefit of London Citizens is that people who would otherwise not come together have come together. Different people come together (Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Muslim, atheist, communist) and work together for the common good. What we would miss the most if this didn't exist is meeting people from different cultures and working together with other people. (Parishioner from St Matthew's Anglican Church, Brixton)*

*If TELCO didn't exist, it would strip people of their voices. [...] We are a big voice when we speak together. [...] We can express what we need as a community, safe environment, affordable housing. (Parishioner from St Margaret's Catholic Church, Canning Town)*

(See [www.londoncitizens.org.uk](http://www.londoncitizens.org.uk))

### **4.2.3 The Froud Centre and Islamic Circles**

The Froud Centre is a multi-purpose community facility where people of all abilities, ages, cultures and faiths come to learn, share experiences, socialise and play. With Aston-Mansfield Charities Trust and St. Michael's Church as two of its main partners, the centre commits its resources and energies into working with the local community of Newham. Aston-Mansfield Charities Trust seeks to respond to the needs and expectations of the east end of London and is committed to tackle issues of poverty, deprivation, racism and powerlessness in Newham.

Islamic Circles is a community-based initiative that has been running at the Froud Centre since January 2001. Islamic lectures and Arabic classes are held on a weekly basis, with a wide range of other regular events and activities also organised. These include short courses, seminars, workshops on issues relevant to the Muslim community, social gatherings like Eid parties, matrimonial services and events and much more. There is also a bazaar, - Islamic bookstalls, gift stalls, frame stalls, food stalls and information stalls.

Through renting space at the Froud Centre to Islamic Circles relationships have been built which have led to: Christian speakers being invited to talk to Islamic Circles about Christianity; a large community meeting being hosted by Muslims after 7/7 together with a community barbeque; and inter-leaved Bible and Koran studies where groups of Christians and Muslims have together studied the Bible one week and the Koran the next. Revd. Brian Lewis, Vicar of St Michael's Church says that their initiative in working with Islamic Circles is about building friendship, trust and understanding in local communities because you never know when you might need it.



#### 4.2.4 London Inter Faith Centre

St Anne's Brondesbury is an Anglican church in Kilburn. The old church building was demolished in 1995 and a new building opened in November 1997. The new building houses a joint ecumenical project with St Andrew's URC church, who moved out of their original building in 1996, and is also home to the London Inter Faith Centre which is jointly led by the Anglican priest and URC minister.

The London Inter Faith Centre is a place for meeting, study and dialogue among the world's religions, and for dialogue between faith communities and the secular world. The Centre works to:-

- Build bridges between faith communities;
- Resource the host culture in approaching these issues; and
- Work in partnership with other agencies in this field

The Centre works with a basic definition of `inter faith` and also with a motto. Its definition of `inter faith` is `faiths in encounter and the issues raised thereby`. The Centre thus emphasises the need for cross community contact, while avoiding any conclusions and simply seeking to facilitate amicable consequent relations. The motto of the Centre is `true to self and open to others`. That is to say no one is asked to compromise their beliefs nor are they judged if they do not have religious beliefs - yet all are encouraged to be open to encounter with those whose position and situation may be very different.

While the Centre is single faith funded and hosted, the work is nonetheless undertaken by those of many faiths.

(See <http://www.londoninterfaith.org.uk/>)

#### 4.2.5 A Rocha

In a town where the train station sign appears in both English and Punjabi, where streets are teeming with life from foreign cultures and where church, mosque, temple and gurdwara compete for local followers - A Rocha is a unique voice. Despite working in a community with 52 separate places of worship, relatively few of these churches, the project has succeeded in uniting a diverse community around the biblical theme of caring for God's creation. "A biblical view of creation recognises the command God gives to people to care for and "rule over" the earth and its creatures (Genesis 1:26-28)," explains A Rocha UK Founder & Director Dave Bookless. "This command is given to people of every faith and none. It demands cooperation between all people."

In partnership with several local faith leaders, two local councils and numerous volunteers from across the community, A Rocha has succeeded in transforming the local environment of the West London suburb. The journey of A Rocha into the heart of multi-cultural, multi-



faith Southall began with Revd Dave Bookless placing recycling banks on his church premises. Already an active member of several council committees, Dave was eager to tackle some of the areas' many environmental problems, which included high levels of air pollution and large amounts of litter in public places. "In addition to these problems, I was shocked to discover that some parts of Southall had the lowest ratio of public green space per household in England," recalls Dave. He also uncovered research by the King's Fund that revealed an increased likelihood of mental health difficulties among those deprived of access to green spaces.

These shocking findings prompted Dave into action. In 2001, with the help of several other Christians, he established a UK branch of the international Christian environmental charity, A Rocha. As well as conducting primary school assemblies on caring for the environment, the project began investigating the potential of nearby Minet Park as a place where local residents could appreciate the local wildlife and environment. However, with burnt-out cars and piles of tyres and industrial waste littering the 90-acre park, many locals viewed the Minet site as nothing more than a dumping ground. After discovering a diverse range of birds, butterflies and other wildlife within the site, A Rocha decided to approach Hillingdon council and propose a council-funded project to create a Country Park and wildlife reserve on the Minet site. Following lengthy discussions, which included several other community groups, the council accepted A Rocha's proposals, and appointed the organisation as Ecological Advisors on a project that would transform the disused site into one of the largest public access parks in urban West London.

"We were successful because we engaged both the structures and key individuals within the council," explains Dave. "We could not have done much of our work without the backing of both Hillingdon and Ealing councils."

With a budget of over £1m and the support of local Hayes MP John McDonnell, A Rocha formed a taskforce of environmental contractors, churchgoers and volunteers from all sections of the local community, to undertake the transformation of Minet Park. Their efforts were rewarded on June 14, 2003, when local residents joined council officials, community leaders and volunteers to celebrate the opening of Minet Park. The celebration concluded with Ram Gidoomal speaking on Ezekiel 36:33-36, which tells of the land that was laid waste becoming like the Garden of Eden. "That really summed up everything we had been working towards," says Dave.

Being clear and upfront about motives has also been beneficial for A Rocha Living Waterways, a Christian project operating in the diverse, multi-faith setting of Southall, West London. Set up in 2001 by local vicar Dave Bookless, A Rocha has succeeded in uniting Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus of various ages around the issue of caring for the environment.

"In a place like Southall, every churchgoer has daily contact with people of other faiths," explains Rev Dave Bookless, the Director of A Rocha UK. "The environment has proved to be an issue we can come together on. We will never agree on everything, but we've found we can work together on this."



The more visible achievements of A Rocha include partnering with the local council and others in a multi-million pound refurbishment of a derelict park and weekly environmental awareness lessons in several primary schools. The less visible success has been uniting a rag-tag group of faith leaders, churchgoers and local volunteers while being clear about the project's Christian identity. As one local Imam put it: "I could not work with multi-faith groups because they fail to take the separate integrity of each faith seriously. But I could work with A Rocha because they were clear and honest about what they believed."

Although staff and volunteers at A Rocha have been able to establish good relationships with people of other faiths, relationships where conversations are "honest and robust", Dave is only too aware of the obstacles facing churches who want to connect with people of different faiths. "Because most people of other faiths are also of other cultures, there is an extra barrier there," Dave explains. "It's a case of working hard to overcome not just religious differences, but cultural ones too."

By focusing on the shared needs of the wider community instead of similarities in theology, A Rocha has avoided some of the obstacles that often dog churches looking to make connections with other faith groups.

Dave Bookless has also suggested some other ways that churches can reach out to people of different faiths living in their local area:

1. If you have neighbours of a different faith, why not take some food around and say 'Hello'? The chances are they will appreciate your efforts and welcome you into their home. It could be the start of a long-lasting friendship.
2. Contact your local mosque/gurdwara/temple/synagogue and find out whether a group from your church could come and visit one day. It will provide you with an opportunity to find out more about their beliefs and establish a relationship with the leader of that faith community.
3. Consider hosting a 'Fun Day' in the grounds of your local church where you invite the wider community, including people of different faiths. The event will be a real blessing to local families and also help you build relationships with those of different faiths.
4. Your church might be able to host basic classes on conversational English for people from different cultures and faiths. This works especially well if it is delivered by women for other women in the community.
5. For more ideas and to find out about taking part in courses on understanding other religions, contact the Faith to Faith Network on 0121 633 8860 or visit [www.faithtofaith.org.uk](http://www.faithtofaith.org.uk)



# Section 5

## How should we engage? Deciding on your approach

### Section introduction

Engagement begins by identifying those places and situations where we encounter people of other faiths.

The exercise included in this section begins by identifying the places of encounter in the Case Studies from the previous section and then goes on to ask you to list the places of encounter for your congregation and area and to work out what engagement in those places will involve practically. By revisiting the Case Studies in the previous section you think through what had to happen and in what way for those encounters to become engagements.

The section also contains a paper reflecting on Christian approaches to people of other faiths, and a list of further resources.

### Section contents

- 5.1 From encounter to engagement
- 5.2 Discussion paper: *Christian approaches to people of other faiths*
- 5.3 Resource list



## 5.1 From encounter to engagement

1. For each of the Case Studies in the previous section identify what people in the Case Study were responding to (the place of encounter) and how they went about engaging with people of other faiths (the way of engagement).
2. Choose two of the Case Studies and list those things that had to be done to move from the place of encounter to the project of engagement. If you think there are activities that would have been involved but which are not stated in the Case Study include these in your list.
3. List as many possible places of encounter with people of other faiths for your congregation as you can.
4. Choose one place of encounter from your list. Think about what kind of engagement project might be appropriate in that place and list the activities that would be necessary to make that project reality.
5. Contact and visit a person or the faith community connected with the place of encounter you selected. Try to learn as much about that faith community as you can in the time you have available. Develop ideas on ways of engaging with that faith community and any information about the beliefs or practices of that faith community it would, on reflection, have been useful for you to have known prior to your visit. Write up your experience (including any leaflets, pictures, notes etc.) and share something of your findings and experience with others in your church.



## 5.2 Discussion Paper

### *Christian Approaches to People of Other Faiths*

Produced by the Faith to Faith Forum ( <http://www.faithtofaith.org.uk> )

When speaking of relationships with people outside the Christian community, we often use the term 'mission'. This word implies a purposive action. We are called to make positive moves to reach out to other people in the name of God and with His love. The love of God is the same and constant for all people and in all situations, but there are also particular considerations in mission among people of other faiths.

The churches (British Council of Churches) have agreed guidelines for interaction between people of different faiths. These are:

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

On this basis, what is good practice for mission?

Reaching out to people of other faiths is about making relationships, that is meeting and building trust, sharing in service and witnessing to the hope we have in Christ. This is not about big events or poster campaigns but everyday interaction and building friendships. Moreover, big campaigns can be ineffective because they can be meaningless to people without such everyday encounter with individual Christians. Such an approach is also potentially threatening to other communities who feel there is a campaign to 'get them'. An example was when a multi faith area was leafleted to publicise a Christian study course and this had a negative impact on community relations. There is a need to maintain good relationships for peace and we need to remember that although many people in the church feel small, the Christian community is regarded by many as both rich, especially in terms of buildings, and influential, for example, there are Bishops in the House of Lords.

It is also important for Christians to be informed about other religions and different cultures so that we can show respect for others and are sensitive to their views and needs. Faith to Faith runs study courses for Christians to learn about other faiths and encourage Christians to think through how they might share their faith with others. We encourage Christians to recognise what is good in other faiths and cultures, and explore both similarities with Christianity and differences.

One time when the Islam study course was run, it was advertised in the local press. The facilitator expected about 25 Christians and then on the first night over 100 people came, including local Muslims. They all shared together and the Muslims commented that it was very positive that Christians were learning about Islam. The leader of the course felt challenged by the presence of Muslims and felt that she must speak openly to them as she





would among Christians. She did, therefore, raise the status of Christians in certain Islamic states. She felt that it was a matter of principle that she was prepared to be transparent in her approach.

When involved in mission among people of different faiths, we must have a keen awareness of the vulnerable so as not to exploit or manipulate them. This often comes down to judging individual situations, but there are situations that come up quite frequently. There is particular concern about children and young people - does anyone have a right to determine or influence their faith? The Human Rights legislation says that parents have rights concerning the nurture of their children within a faith. However, at what age do children begin to have the right to search for and make their own decisions?

We must be careful how we reach out to young people. One example of good practice is the Malachi Trust that presents the Christian faith through the medium of the Contemporary Arts. Family reconciliation ministry is at the heart of its vision. They have written musicals for use with children and young people to address some of the deepest concerns and causes of family breakdown, truancy, teenage rebellion, youth crimes, drug addiction and emotional crises. One of the great values of this ministry has been the bridge-building nature because teachers, parents and faith leaders of all persuasions have endorsed and valued this ministry. In addition, children are given a place to develop their talents, build their self-esteem, form positive relationships with Christian adults in a supportive environment and explore issues of faith and discipleship in the context of a loving community.

Other examples of vulnerability are recently arrived asylum seekers, people with limited English language skills and women in difficult domestic situations. One aspect of being sensitive to such vulnerability is to be vulnerable ourselves. This includes a willingness to learn from others and to change. Faith is often described as a journey (classically, Pilgrim's Progress), and along the way we learn new things, experience new things and are tested in our faithfulness. For some Christians, learning from people of other faiths is part of that journey. So be vulnerable, try and learn another language or a new way of cooking, for example, if you are English, learn some Asian recipes. Put yourself in a position where you need to ask for help so that there can be give and take in the relationship.

Another part of good practice is to be at peace with neighbours and to foster good community relations. This can be enhanced by service to others. We must, however, be careful in our approach so as not to be seen as paternalistic or manipulative. Service to the community must be done in co-operation with others. It must not simply be based around a Christian agenda, and so if we want to make a contribution locally then we need to find out what local people need rather than thinking what might be 'good for them'. Perhaps it's best to join in with what is already happening rather than set up something new.

A further consideration is the role of prayer. Those reaching out to people of other faiths from a South Asian background often find that they receive requests for prayers in the name of Jesus because Jesus is highly regarded as either a prophet and/or holy man. It is important that Christians respond positively to such requests and pray with people and also for them.



This must be done with confidence that God hears our prayers and also with sensitivity so as not to give the impression that prayer is some kind of 'magic formula' with success guaranteed. In mission, we may also encounter strong beliefs in curses and counter curses to which we must respond positively. In Peter's Epistle we are exhorted to be a blessing not a curse to people. Prayer is one part of the blessing that we can share.

Building friendships, learning about other faiths, being sensitive to vulnerability, serving others and prayer are all aspects of good practice in mission among people of other faiths. These can be our models for action as we reach out to people of other faiths.



## 5.3 Resource list

### Books

- J. Bowker, *Hallowed Ground*, SPCK, 1993  
D. Cohen-Sherbok, *Interfaith Theology: A Reader*, Oneworld Publications, 2001  
G. D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, Continuum, 2000  
J. Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Orbis, 1997  
M. Ipgrave, *Hospitality of the Heart*, Churches Together in England  
J. Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, Continuum, 2002  
M. Torry & S. Thorley, *Together & Different: Christians Engaging with People of Other Faiths*, Canterbury Press, 2008  
A. Wingate, *Celebrating Difference, Staying Faithful*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005

### Publications

- *Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs: Short guidelines for inter religious encounter and dialogue* - <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/pcode.htm>
- *Embassy, hospitality & dialogue: Christians and people of other faiths* - <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/lambeth/reports/report3.html>
- *Faith and community: A good practice guide for local authorities* - <http://www.lga.gov.uk/Publication.asp?Section=0&id= SX102F-A7806AE2>
- *Faith as social capital: How far should faith communities engage with government agendas, and what can they contribute to building bridges and forging links with others* - <http://www.jrf.org.uk/node/2358>
- *Faith Communities Toolkit: Toolkit for leaders in the learning & skills sector* - <http://www.centreforexcellence.org.uk/default.aspx?Page=StrategicDocument>
- *Faith to Faith and Side by Side, a framework how faith communities, Government and wider society can work together* - <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/facetofaceframework>
- *Generous Love: the truth of the gospel and the call to dialogue – an Anglican theology of inter faith relations*, Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns, The Anglican Consultative Council, 2008 - <http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/resources/documents>
- *Involving Faith Communities: A practical guide on how successfully to involve faith communities in activity and discussion* - <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=177>
- *The Local Inter Faith Guide: A guide to setting up and running a local inter faith initiative* - <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/localguide.htm>
- *Inter Faith Organisations in the UK: A directory listing details of over 200 organisations working to promote good inter faith relations at UK-wide, national, regional and local level* - <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/orderdirectory.htm>
- *Presence & Engagement: In what ways is the Spirit calling churches and individuals to engage with the new diversities* - <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/interfaith/presence.pdf>



- *Staying Present & Engaging Faithfully*, an update to *Presence & Engagement* - [www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/feb09/gsl720.pdf](http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/feb09/gsl720.pdf)
- *Working Together: Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities* - <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/workingtog-faith040329.pdf>
- *The Presence and Engagement Resource and Links* website: [www.presenceandengagement.org.uk](http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk)
- *An Anglican understanding of mission and evangelism* by Bishop Michael Doe. Published by the Anglican Communion Office July 2008

## Information

- Faith – Communities and Local Government webpage - <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/racecohesionfaith/faith/>
- faithandfood.com: what, why, and where you can eat in accordance with your faith - <http://www.faithandfood.com/>
- Focus on Religion: paints a picture of the different faith groups in the UK today - <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/focuson/religion/>
- Interfaith Relations: Church of England resources and information - <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/interfaith/>
- Religion & Ethics: information and news - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/>

## Organisations

- Faith Regen UK: unleashing the potential of all to establish cohesive and sustainable communities through multi-faith action - <http://www.faithregenuk.org/>
- Greater London Presence and Engagement Network – PEN offers resources for Christian mission and ministry in multi faith context across the Greater London Boroughs in the Diocese of Chelmsford, London, Rochester and Southwark [www.londonpen.org](http://www.londonpen.org)
- Faith Communities Consultative Council <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/racecohesionfaith/faith/faithcommunities/faithcommunitiesconsultative>
- The Inter Faith Network for the UK: founded to promote good relations between people of different faiths in this country - <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/>



**The Contextual Theology Centre** is located in the East End of London. Few areas have such diversity of faiths and cultures, or as positive an experience of them living and working together.

The Centre's purpose is to bring faith into an active dialogue with the context in which people live and work. It combines grassroots engagement and links with international centres of academic excellence.

The Greater London Presence and Engagement Network (PEN) is a project of the Centre for the four Anglican Dioceses covering Greater London.

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