

Interfaith Matters

Issue No. 7 April 2011

COMMUNITY NEWS AND FEATURES FOR EVERYONE

www.eifa.org.uk



Holocaust Memorial Day

Craigroyston High pupils rise to the challenge of staging national HMD event



Edinburgh's Religious Leaders discuss the impact of city's budget cuts on the vulnerable.

Faiths unite in concern over cuts

A gathering of Edinburgh's religious leaders and faith community representatives took place during interfaith week in the City Chambers. Representatives of major faiths and their denominations present in Edinburgh attended and included representatives from Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Bahai, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhism, Hindu, Pagan, Sikh, Quaker and Unitarian traditions.

Discussions included a Scottish Government Equalities Update, the City Council's Budget Review especially matters affecting

the elderly, Lothian and Borders Community Safety and Diversity, Spiritual Care in NHS Lothian and the recent visit by Pope Benedict XVI.

Victor Spence, General Secretary of the Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association said: 'having seen details of cut backs in council budgets that could have a direct impact on acutely vulnerable people in our community it became very important that the faith leaders of the city among others in the wider community heard more and discussed the matter. Delegates welcomed

the discussions with city council officials and their reassurances.'

Rabbi David Rose, conference delegate and Co-Convenor of The Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association said: "city faith leaders also discussed the potential development of 'well-being' indicators in the city alongside economic and other indicators. Happiness and well-being cannot be measured in simple economic terms and we should consider a range of well-being factors. We welcome the City Council's interest and willingness to discuss this

further."

Scottish Government Minister Fergus Ewing MSP addressed the capital's faith leaders where he was asked and answered a number of questions. Fergus Ewing MSP also said: "Events like this are extremely important in bringing together different communities in a common purpose. We all want to live in a Scotland where mutual trust, respect and understanding form the basis for our lives and our relationships with others. I know that these basic principles will underpin the

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InterfaithMatters

At grassroots, city level and wider within the Lothians there has been a tremendous growth in inter-faith encounter and engagement in the past 5-10 years. This new community newspaper is part of this growth.

For this newspaper to be truly a community project we invite volunteers from our richly diverse and experienced community to come forward to take a leading role in the development and growth of not only the newspaper but inter-faith community action. Articles in this seventh edition have been written by people from the faith communities. We welcome contributions.

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Wanted - festival volunteers

The Festival of Spirituality and Peace is one of Edinburgh's fastest growing festivals, and at the heart of our festival programme are our Festival volunteers. In order to make the Festival happen, we need a team of committed and motivated volunteers to help deliver events and create a dynamic Festival community throughout August and throughout the year. Volunteering is a fantastic way of being right at centre of this exciting Festival as well as making new friends. We invite volunteers from all faiths, cultures, backgrounds and ages to join us in delivering the Festival of Spirituality and Peace 2011. In 2009 we were awarded Investing in Volunteers status by Volunteer Development Scotland. The award recognises excellence in the recruitment, support and management of volunteers and is a symbol of our commitment to and appreciation of everyone who donates



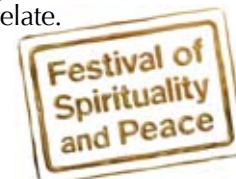
Volunteers are crucial to the success of the Festival of Spirituality and Peace

their time and effort to the Festival. If you are interested in volunteering for the Festival of Spirituality and Peace, have a look at our website: www.festivalofspirituality.org.uk/volunteering where you can download

an application form. If you have any questions at all about volunteering for the Festival, contact Festival Coordinator

Katherine Newbigging:
katherine@festivalofspirituality.org.uk. This year our

Festival theme is exploring faiths and concepts of reality and how the two interrelate.



From page 1

Conference discussions.

Cllr Jenny Dawe, Leader of The City of Edinburgh Council said: "The City of Edinburgh Council wholeheartedly support the Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association in its endeavours to promote diversity, dialogue, understanding, mutual respect and co-operation between the faith communities in our city.

Positive and engaged inter-faith relations are a significant contribution to community cohesion in very local communities as well as city wide. This year's theme for Inter-faith Week of 'Bringing People Together' truly sums up what inter-faith week is all about.

We also acknowledge the growing reputation around the world that the Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association has for its leadership and innovation in a challenging but essential field of work."

Action call on child poverty

A senior Church of Scotland minister has questioned the seriousness of the Coalition about challenging child poverty.

Rev Ian Galloway, the Convener of the Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland, writing in his blog about the long-awaited UK child poverty strategy to be published before Westminster breaks-up for Easter recess, accuses the coalition government of reticence.

The strategy which will lay out how the UK Government, alongside Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish and local authorities, will reach the targets of eradicating child poverty by 2020. It should have been published on March 25 and still hasn't been released.

Mr Galloway said:

"They've already missed that deadline but the Government has assured MPs that the strategy will be published before the recess. It is not just the date of release that the Government is dragging its heels on. The 2010 Act requires a commission to be set up, whose role includes giving advice on the writing of the UK strategy. I hope that this isn't an indication of this issue dropping further down the list of priorities of our government. Both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats supported the Child Poverty Act when they were in opposition, so what is causing this reticence to comply now? To take the challenge of tackling child poverty in this country seriously, the UK Government needs to be serious about implementing this law."



Rev Ian Galloway

The Child Poverty Act was passed with the aim of eliminating childhood poverty in the UK. The Church of Scotland in partnership with other faith groups and organisations previously presented a response to a paper from the Scottish Government, voicing disappointment that it did not include strategic priorities or actions with long and short-term targets.

First Minister welcomes EIFA to the Scottish Parliament



Shabnam Hussain of Beyond The Veil Muslim Women's Group met with Alex Salmond MSP First Minister of Scotland to discuss their work and to have the First Minister's endorsement of our Interfaith Matters newspaper.

Speaking shortly after a meeting with EIFA representatives at the Scottish Parliament, First Minister Alex Salmond said: "I was delighted to welcome Shabnam Hussein and Victor Spence of the Edinburgh Inter Faith Association (EIFA) to my office at the Scottish

Parliament in December.

I was more than a little impressed to hear of the range and number of activities delivered by EIFA during their extended interfaith week. Scottish Inter Faith Week is an important time for all of us and the contribution of EIFA – through their Conference

of Religious Leaders and interfaith dialogue events to the meet your neighbour and civic café events – adds significantly to making Scottish Inter Faith Week a world renowned event on the annual interfaith calendar. I am sure that everyone who participated in EIFA's events found them interesting, enjoyable and valuable, and I look forward to reading about them in the next issue of Interfaith Matters.

I very much appreciate and value the work all Scotland's faith communities do in their neighbourhoods – often quietly and unsung – supporting the vulnerable, the lonely, the old and young. The contribution that our faith communities make to enriching Scotland's social, cultural and economic capital is huge, and I am grateful for all the work they do. This rich diversity of faith and belief makes a Scotland stronger, and better, nation."



Cardinal Keith O'Brien with Imam Shahbaz Ahmad, Sumayah Ahad and some of the young ladies and children of the Blackhall Mosque community.

Cardinal visits Muslim friends

A highlight event of 2010 Inter Faith week programme was the visit of His Eminence Archbishop Keith Patrick Cardinal O'Brien to the new Blackhall Mosque in Edinburgh for the first time.

Cardinal Keith Patrick O'Brien said: 'I have been deeply privileged to meet with many Muslim friends in Scotland and indeed across the world over many years. I was grateful to have been invited to visit the new Blackhall Mosque in Edinburgh and to witness the Muslim community thriving.

Victor Spence, General

Secretary of the Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association (EIFA) said:

'One of our aims is to bring people together from the many diverse faiths and cultures here in our city. We recall the wonderful reception Cardinal O'Brien received when he visited Annandale Street Mosque and the Sikh Gurdwara in Leith.

We are delighted to be working with the Cardinal and Blackhall Mosque in this Inter faith week and bringing people of different faiths and cultures together to share hospitality and friendship.'

Pupils' Qi Gong masterclass

Yuan Xiu Gang a Daoist Priest and exponent of Qi Gong and Kung Fu, took time out of his speaking tour to give around 150 fifth and sixth year pupils of St Thomas of Aquins High school a taste of Qi Gong.

Master Yuan was accepted as a disciple by the great Master Zhong Yun Long at the famous Daoist centre at Wudang Mountain and went on to develop his own personalised style of Tai Chi and Qi Gong.

As Tai Chi has become increasingly popular in the west, Master Yuan's school of Tai Chi has established itself in many countries, including Scotland.

Victor Spence, general secretary of Edinburgh Interfaith Association, added:



Master Yuan with some of his new pupils

"In relation to our sizable Chinese community here in Edinburgh, this will give people a better understanding

and insight into the religious, philosophical and spiritual life of many of our Chinese neighbours."

Come dine with us

EIFA, in partnership with St John's Church hosts a monthly community meal on the first Monday of each month in the church hall at 6.00 pm. This is an opportunity to meet friends old and new and to discuss issues of the day or explore the

religion or beliefs of others over dinner. Food is cooked and provided on a donation basis by our volunteer chef Chris.

Please let us know if possible that you intend to come by emailing us at : info@eifa.org.uk or calling 0131 228 8146.



Craigroyston High pupils take the lead on Holocaust Memorial Day

Craigroyston High School hosted the Scottish National and City of Edinburgh Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration Event on the evening of 27 January. Pupils from the school, working in collaboration with a number of their teachers and with support from the Edinburgh Interfaith Association and the Holocaust Memorial Trust, took a key part in devising the structure and content of the event, including musical input, originating poetry and performing readings.

While the principle focus of the event was upon the Nazi holocaust, which affected not only Jews but other groups including Gypsies, whose stories were told by members of today's Gypsy traveller community, we also heard about the horrors of Rwanda, from Jean-Pierre Mugenda, a young Rwandan man, now working with the Scottish Refugee Council.

Two pupils from All Saints Roman Catholic Secondary

School in Glasgow spoke of their visit to the Auschwitz concentration camp and of the profound affect that had upon them. Times' journalist Mike Wade spoke movingly of his meeting with Ernest Levy, Scotland's best known Holocaust survivor, shortly before his death.

While the keynote speech was given by the First Minister, Alex Salmond (see opposite) a most memorable contribution of the evening came from Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp, a Dutch Holocaust survivor.

Rabbi Soetendorp, had already met the pupils of Craigroyston, when he began a busy day of engagements by addressing two morning assemblies of the pupils, telling them something of his personal story. Now he spoke of his hope for the future, and the inspiration he took from his early experience.

Beginning on a positive note, Rabbi Soetendorp said "I believe with my heart and soul that compassion will



The Craigroyston Community High School Choir performed beautifully to both open and to close a memorable and moving Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration event.

prevail in a world that is struggling to remain forever one." He went on to recount the story of how his parents gave him into the care of a German born Catholic woman and her Dutch husband, while they themselves went into hiding in the Dutch countryside. For two years he and another Jewish child lived entirely in the cellar of their adoptive family's home. Then, with the allied armies perhaps only hours away, a bomb fell close to the house. His adoptive father went out to see what help he could give and young Awraham followed, into his first daylight for two years. But a second bomb landed closeby, and his adoptive father flung himself between Awraham

and the blast, protecting him, but at the cost of his own life.

This selfless act not only saved Awraham's life but clearly deeply influenced him and led him to see the need to foster compassion.

"Evil", said the Rabbi, "is contagious, but thank God, good is contagious too." Focussing on the importance of education in nurturing compassion and human values, he stated; "The difference between becoming a collaborator who stands and watches, and those who transcend their ego and become part of the honourable minority who act to save another's life even at the cost of their own, is made in the classroom."

He went on to note that all

too often, our religions have failed badly and he called on them to rise to the challenge of leading the way in teaching that we are one human family.

Drawing to a conclusion, he noted that there were signs of humanity amidst tragedy. In Rwanda, some Hutus saved Tutsis, in Srebrenica some Christians saved Muslims, In Israel and Palestine, there are those on both sides working for peace.

The challenge for the human race was to create a world filled with "cooperation, love, truth and righteousness". He ended by calling on young and old to work together to hold "the door for life and justice forever open."



Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp is interviewed about his extraordinary life by two pupils of Craigroyston High School, following the Holocaust Memorial Day event.



First Minister Alex Salmond pictured here chatting with some pupils at Craigroyston High School, spoke highly of their efforts in creating and staging the 2011 HMD event.

An edited extract of the First Minister's address to this year's Holocaust Memorial Day event

"Holocaust Memorial Day is a time to reflect and remember the past and the millions of real people who suffered in the Holocaust, under Nazi persecution and whose lives were lost during this dreadful atrocity. It is also time to spare a thought for countless others whose lives continue to be affected by the Holocaust and subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur.

"By continuing to remember those whose lives were taken and honouring those who suffered and continue to suffer today, we not only keep memories alive but

we gain an understanding of events that allows us to examine our own communities, share our own experiences and play our part in ensuring that genocide, racism, bigotry and victimisation play no part in our society. Each of us has a moral responsibility to ourselves, our neighbours and our communities to challenge discrimination, wherever it happens.

"I am privileged to be part of this year's Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration, which has been designed by the young people at Craigroyston

Community High School in Edinburgh. These young people are a credit to themselves, their families and their community.

"Today I would ask all Scots to consider the role that they can play in sharing in these Untold Stories. Listen to these stories, learn from them and go back to your friends, families and communities and share them with others. It is only by doing this that we can recognise the consequences of fear, bigotry and persecution and learn the lessons of the past to create a better future."

Leading Rabbi meets Church of Scotland Moderator



Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp is presented with a plaque 'Honouring genocide victims', by the Right Reverend John Christie, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

One of the world's most prominent rabbis and human rights campaigners marked Holocaust Memorial Day in a special service at the Church of Scotland offices in Edinburgh.

In what was a first for the Kirk, Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp delivered the homily as members of staff and members of other faith groups gathered in the chapel in 121 George Street to pay their respects to those who suffered under the Third Reich and other genocidal regimes.

Rabbi Soetendorp, member of the Islam-West Dialogue group of the World Economic Forum and ambassador of the Millennium Development Goals, paid tribute to all who had lost their lives in horrific genocides, and told the story of how he himself came so close to being killed by German soldiers as a child.

The rabbi also said that all human life is made in God's image, and that peace will never happen until all faiths learn to work together in harmony.

The service was closed with a blessing from Rabbi David Rose from the Edinburgh Jewish Synagogue.

The commemoration was organised by Church of Scotland interfaith worker Iain Stewart, who also took part. Mr Stewart said: "We were pleased to join in solidarity with people from another faith and with people all over the world as we paid homage to the tragic victims of the Holocaust and other genocides."



In common with people all around the world marking Holocaust memorial day, the pupils of Craigroyston High School lit candles in memory of the millions of people who have lost their lives to genocide.

HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL DAY





New support for survivors of childhood sexual abuse

There are some harsh truths which need to be challenged. Last week Glasgow, Dundee and Edinburgh saw the launch of The Ethnic Survivors Forum, an initiative which aims to support minority ethnic adults who have suffered from childhood sexual abuse.

Not an easy subject to discuss openly, nor a topic which many people will argue is an issue in our community. Yet at the event launch we heard first hand the words of a female ethnic survivor who was sexually abused from the age of 6 to 13. It was not easy to speak of what is a taboo issue in the heart of the community without exposing herself to further hostility and vilification, yet in front of over 60 guests at each event, the survivor was shown tremendous compassion and respect for her courage in coming forward and sharing with us her horrific experience.

Tears were shed in the room, shivers were running

down the spine of many prominent community leaders and individuals were left with the thought-provoking and powerful words embedded in their hearts. A few moments of silence were required by those in the hushed room to allow some level of composure.

Supported by the Scottish Government, the Ethnic Survivors Forum will work with males and females who traditionally would have thought turning to outside agencies and taking legal action as a fraught decision since it involves breaking their silence and publicly taking steps that are perceived negatively by the community.

Roshni, the organisation leading on this initiative are at the forefront of breaking down the barriers of under-reporting within minority communities.

Ali Khan, chair of roshni made the following comments: "On behalf of roshni, we extend our gratitude to the survivor, for not only

having the courage to talk openly, but for also realising that her words will most definitely provide support to others who have faced similar tragedies. This service is for members of all ethnic minority communities and we hope that they will feel that they can now begin the journey to ensuring that their lives and the lives of their loved ones can move forward.

"Roshni also extends a vote of thanks to all the guests, covering communities, local government, statutory bodies and the voluntary sector. There is no doubt, that the heartfelt plea from the survivor will reverberate for a long time.

"I request everyone to promote this service through their networks and ensure that there is no household that is not aware of this initiative."

For more information on the project, please visit the website www.ethnicsurvivorsforum.org.uk.

Zoe Spence



Cardinal O'Brien presenting the Papal Medal to Victor Spence of the Edinburgh Interfaith Association.

Papal medal for EIFA General Secretary

At a reception earlier this year, Archbishop Keith Patrick Cardinal O'Brien bestowed Papal Medals from Pope Benedict XVI to a cross-section of people who had helped in various ways with regard to the visit of the Pope to Scotland last September.

Among the recipients was Mr Victor Spence, the General Secretary of Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association, who is also Secretary to the Conference of Edinburgh's Religious Leaders.

Speaking of the award, Cardinal O'Brien said: "Over many years now Victor Spence has stimulated Edinburgh's Religious Leaders and all people of goodwill in the City of Edinburgh and beyond with regard to their shared apostolate of 'promoting dialogue, mutual respect, understanding, co-operation, diversity and peace within our richly diverse city and beyond'."

'His leadership at the time of the Papal Visit was very much appreciated by myself and I had the great privilege of pointing out various representatives of the other faiths in Edinburgh as they gathered at the West End of Princes Street to greet the

Pope – thanks to the initiatives of Victor himself.'

Papal Medals were distributed to people who had a particular role to play with regard to the Papal Visit. Other recipients in Edinburgh included Sir Tom Farmer, Bishop Brian Smith, Assistant Chief Constable Iain Livingstone, Cardinal O'Brien's own household who did the cooking and looking after the Pope and a number of others in the city.

Victor Spence, General Secretary of The Edinburgh Interfaith Association said: 'I am delighted that His Eminence Cardinal O'Brien chose to recognise me personally for this award and more importantly the work of the Edinburgh Interfaith Association and indeed the presence in our city of a wide range of faith traditions who's representatives were delighted to turn out to welcome His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to Edinburgh and Scotland.'



Interfaith Matters - It's a capital read



The Rt Hon. Cllr. George Grubb Lord Provost and Lady Provost Elizabeth Grubb, receive their copy of *Interfaith Matters* from Rabbi David Rose Co-Convener of EIFA and Ani Rinchen Khandro the Buddhist Representative on EIFA board



Supporters of Jubilee Scotland launch the new Defuse the Debt Crisis campaign at the Scottish Parliament.

Jubilee calls time on unjust debt

MSPs met with Jubilee Scotland and community leaders at Holyrood on 22 March, to launch the new Defuse the Debt Crisis campaign and call for an end to unjust debt in impoverished countries.

Defuse the Debt Crisis wants to help the many poor nations bearing the burden of heavy and unpayable debt as a result of loans made to repressive dictators. These loans often found their way into the hands of corrupt politicians, rather than benefiting the people through improved education, healthcare and infrastructure. Now these people are forced to repay large debts – with even greater interest – on money they never saw in the first place.

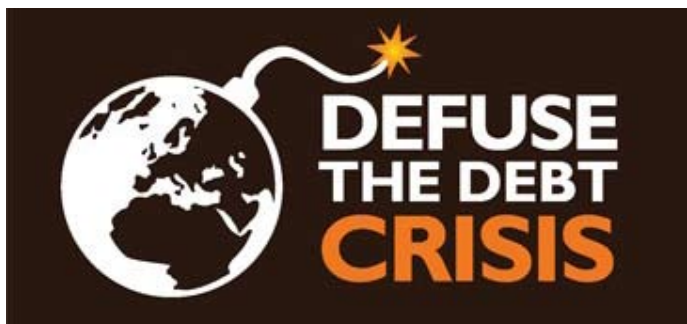
Jubilee Scotland campaigns to end this unjust debt by calling for responsible lending and accountability from Western lending institutions. As Scotland

does not possess any unjust debt, it is in an ideal position to lead the way by promoting itself as an arbiter of international debt. Support for Tuesday's event, featuring MSP Des McNulty, showed that Scottish people care about this issue and want it on the agenda in the upcoming Scottish elections.

Although the idea of the Jubilee comes from the Old Testament, solving unjust debt and helping the world's poorest is an issue that resonates deeply with all people, regardless of faith or background. Jubilee Scotland reflects these ideals and receives support from a variety of different faith and charity groups. Organisations such as ours reveal a common ground and set of common values that all faiths can agree on. It is only by working together, that we can make a difference.

Find out more at: www.jubileescotland.org.uk

Sarah Whittam



FEATURED FESTIVAL

Passover - Exodus relived



Rabbi David Rose

The Festival of Passover is one of the cornerstones of Judaism, commemorating the founding myth of the Jewish people: the Exodus from Egypt.

The removal of leaven from the home, the transformation of the kitchen and the special Seder meal, combine to make this a unique experience for Jews everywhere.

Jews do not merely commemorate the Exodus but

seek to re-experience it, by the eating of unleavened bread and bitter herbs and the retelling of the story. Lying behind these rituals are ideas which have had a profound influence on our world. The Creator and Master of the universe intervened in history on the side of a group of slaves fighting a mighty empire. God thus revealed Himself as not only the Lord of Nature but the Master of history.

The Exodus teaches us that right, not might is right, and God supports freedom over tyranny and justice over oppression. Many other peoples have taken up this story and drawn strength and hope from its message. There would have been no fall of the Berlin wall or President Obama, without the inspiration of the Passover story.

Exiled Jewry itself has seen in the story a promise for the future, one partially realised in the return to Zion in our own generation. The key to

this redemptive character of the festival is the emphasis on children, whose questions are the basis of the narrative told on this night.

When children ask questions of their parents and teachers, redemptive change becomes possible. Thus Jews commemorate the birth of their nation and religion, and its message to humanity. When we sit down at the Passover meal we do not merely commemorate the past, but proclaim a message for the future: let freedom ring!

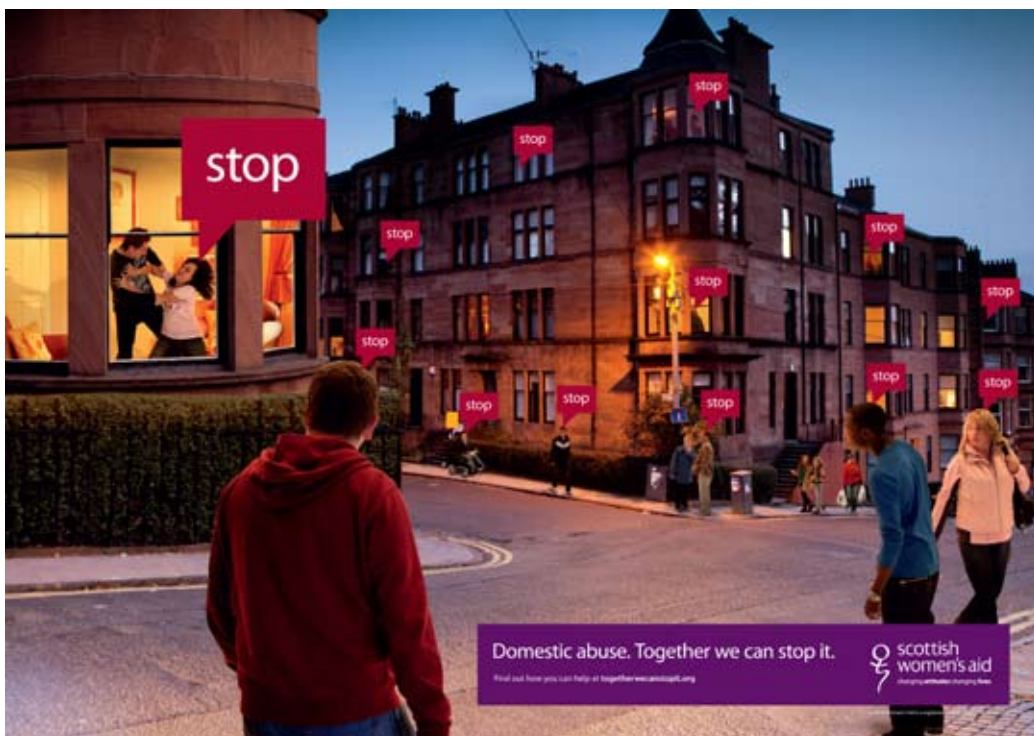
Rabbi David Rose



A traditional plate used for the Passover meal.

Religious calendar

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|---|---|
| <p>ॐ April Tuesday 12
Rama Navami (Hindu)
Birthday of Lord Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu.</p> | <p>✝ April Friday 22
Good Friday (Christian)
Commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.</p> |
| <p>ੴ April Wednesday 13
Vaisakhi (Sikh)
The Sikh New Year, which also commemorates the founding of the Khalsa by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh in 1699.</p> | <p>✝ April Sunday 24
Easter (Christian)
Celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the most important Christian festival</p> |
| <p>ੴ April Thursday 14
Birthday of Guru Nanak (Sikh)
Founder of the Sikh religion born on 14 April in 1469.</p> | <p>☉ May Sunday 1
Beltane (Pagan)
Ancient Celtic spring festival</p> |
| <p>☸ April Monday 18
Theravada New Year (Buddhist)
Three day festival celebrated from the first full moon in April.</p> | <p>☸ May Tuesday 17
Wesak (Buddhist)
Celebrates the Buddha's birthday</p> |
| <p>☸ April Tuesday 19
Passover (Jewish)
See featured festival</p> | <p>☸ May Monday 23
Declaration of the Bab (Bahai)
The Bab was the forerunner of Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i faith. His mission was to prepare the world for the coming of Baha'u'llah.</p> |



Faith groups can help to tackle domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is very common. You probably know someone: a friend, colleague, neighbour or family member who has directly experienced it. But we are all affected by it in some way, and this is why Scottish Women's Aid has started a conversation with faith groups see how together we can challenge domestic abuse in our communities.

The Scottish Women's Aid STOP campaign was launched in November 2010, and aims to engage with communities across Scotland to highlight that we have a shared responsibility for ending domestic abuse. An important strand of this campaign is working with faith groups, and enabling them to build upon their capacity to respond to domestic abuse. To achieve this aim, Scottish Women's

Aid will provide support under three key headings: connecting people, providing resources, and building activism.

In February 2011, we held a consultation attended by representatives from many of Scotland's faith communities including Muslims, Sikhs and various Christian denominations, to consider how to develop our campaign in order to strengthen and support the existing work being carried out in faith communities. The outcomes of the consultation will be taken forward by Scottish Women's Aid, in collaboration with faith group representatives, and are as follows:

Create a networking forum for faith community representatives

Gather existing domestic abuse resources, and create

relevant resources where there are gaps

Demonstrate the interfaith commitment through creating a leaflet with scriptural references and visual images from different religions

Produce a 'ten things you can do in faith communities' z-card

Promote 'get savi' (by-stander project for young people) through on-campus faith groups

If you are interested in finding out more about the campaign and how you can get involved, please contact Fiona Buchanan at fionabuchanan@scottish-womensaid.org.uk or telephone 0131 226 6606



Dialogue Matters

The preceding columns have outlined the pillars of effective dialogue: purpose, humility, trust, listening and asking. In this issue, Sohaib Saeed completes the set by discussing partners for dialogue.



Sohaib Saeed

There is a good reason to describe people engaged in dialogue as partners: when done properly, dialogue is about working together to find solutions. There is a destination these travellers are all trying to reach, be it as grand as a platform for cooperation, or as simple as a higher level of mutual understanding.

Much media discourse is obsessed with distinguishing the extremist/radical elements of society – or of a particular community – from its moderate/mainstream members. For the purposes of dialogue, we should be ready to talk constructively with anyone who is likewise ready to talk constructively. In a way, this is what defines people as reasonable rather than fanatical.

Yet there will be scenarios where we find ourselves in dialogue with people whose views we find distasteful, even extreme. This should not be surprising: it has been said that you don't make peace by talking to your friends, but by talking to your enemies. There is a time and a method for each. Indeed, it is by challenging assumptions and providing a more holistic perspective

that people are brought from extremes into the middle ground.

We are keen to find representatives from communities we seek to engage in dialogue. But representative of what: of a faith, or of a community? Can any of us speak on behalf of God, or even in the name of thousands or billions of people? What we

Can any of us speak on behalf of God, or even in the name of thousands or billions of people?

need is a sense of perspective and a realistic attitude about ourselves and others.

There is limited benefit in picking out obvious allies; likewise for easy opponents. Rational, open-minded and articulate people may always be a minority, but a sincere ambassador can still project the true concerns of his or her community. If the community gives that ambassador an explicit mandate, all the better.

Nowadays, we need to widen the circle of dialogue and bring more people in. Some are neutral and waiting for a hand to be extended to them, and to be treated with respect. If even enemies can become friends through dialogue, why on earth would we turn potential friends against us?

Sohaib Saeed

Send us your news

We would like to receive your contributions to this community newspaper. Send us your letters, news, event listings or articles from your group or community to: editor@eifa.org.uk



Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association