



# ***Thinking Globally, Acting Locally***

## ***A Trilogy of Events to Mark World Interfaith Harmony Week***

Through dialogue and practical interfaith action, this ambitious trilogy of events marked World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW) 2020 by addressing three pressing global challenges: rising levels of prejudice and hate crime; climate change; and the growing need to welcome and support people displaced by conflict and poverty. WIHW provided a perfect opportunity to bring people from diverse faith and belief backgrounds together in Glasgow to recognise our interconnectedness with those facing the same challenges elsewhere; to work together to address them locally; and to see our local efforts within the global context, standing in solidarity with all those who commit themselves to the values of WIHW and seek to create a better world. In welcoming people to each of our events, Interfaith Glasgow's CEO, Dr Rose Drew, explained the purpose and value of WIHW and located the intention of each event in terms of the values WIHW promotes.

We believe that "interfaith is for everyone" and, like WIHW, that tackling these global challenges requires work that "invites everyone, excludes no one, and is purely voluntary". The events described below were all fully booked, having been advertised as widely as our limited means permit, and participants came from all over Glasgow and beyond, from a large variety of faith and belief backgrounds. We couldn't do what we do without the support of volunteers and partners across the city. Almost 30 volunteers were involved in the delivery of the events described in this report and we worked collaboratively with many other groups, organisations, and faith communities, sharing resources for maximum impact. We are grateful, in particular, to St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art for hosting the first two events and to Castlemilk Community Church for hosting the third.

Alongside this report, please also find included with our submission: a short film documenting our WIHW programme; more photographs from each event; a document containing letters of endorsement from dignitaries who attended one or more event, and another containing general letters of support from representatives of partner organisations familiar with our work.

# Upstanders Not Bystanders

## Challenging Hate Speech as it's Happening

St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art  
Sunday 26 January, 1.30 – 4pm

Over the last few years, many countries – including the UK – have witnessed some deeply worrying trends, including growing anti-immigrant sentiment; the rise of the far-right; acts of terrorism against minorities; growing anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of prejudice; and rising hate crime. World Interfaith Harmony Week offers an antidote to these trends by providing a time in the year when people across the globe are invited to show their commitment to the values of peace, unity, and understanding; and to redouble their efforts and demonstrate their public commitment to cherishing and protecting the diversity of the human family.

“every workplace/  
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this event.”

Prejudice and hatred are often fuelled by ignorance, misconceptions, and fear of the unknown. There is much that Interfaith Glasgow does throughout the year to address these root causes by fostering empathetic connections between people from different backgrounds so that people discover commonalities, become more comfortable with differences, and develop a more inclusive sense of identity and belonging. But we have become increasingly aware that an understanding of – and sense of empathy for – our fellow human beings is not always enough to ensure that we stand up for them in the face of attack from those who don't hold these values.



Many victims of hate crime and hate incidents report the fact that others stood by and did nothing as particularly distressing. This inaction tends to make victims feel extremely isolated and creates the sense that everyone is on the side of their attacker. This makes any incident more traumatic and, in the aftermath, can contribute to a sense of being unsupported by one's wider community and a questioning of one's sense of

belonging within that community. It therefore really matters how people respond when they witness someone being attacked because of their religion or perceived religion.

We believe that the majority of people do not support the perpetrator; and that, by and large, witnesses fail to support victims not because they approve of what is happening, but because fear, embarrassment, or uncertainty about how to respond preclude effective action. What is needed, then, is not simply to implore people stand up for victims of hate speech (most people know they ought to) but rather to actively empower them to do so by providing them with the tools and confidence.



*Farkhanda Chaudry, Equality and Diversity Trainer*



*Sarah Robinson Galloway, Senior Action on Prejudice Officer for Youth Link Scotland*



*Sabahat Rabbani, a GP and mother who has experienced prejudice and abuse*

The evidence suggests that we are more likely to act effectively in a situation of stress if we have thought our way through similar situations in advance. The intention of our WIHW event addressing rising levels of prejudice and hate crime was, then, a very practical one. We wanted to create space for people to think through – with people from other traditions – how they might respond in such a situation, thereby empowering each other – through dialogue – to be upstanders not bystanders. To facilitate this, participants heard from expert speakers and those with lived experience of religiously motivated hate crime, and in small groups, explored together strategies for challenging hate speech as it is happening.

Each group explored two of a possible six scenarios, discussing – from their diverse perspectives and experiences – how they could respond and what the possible impact might be. The scenarios were all based on real incidents. They included, for example:

- You are in a busy railway station and witness a girl being punched and her hijab removed;
- You are on a bus and witness a Jewish man having his kippah set alight;
- You are on a train and witness an elderly Sikh man wearing a turban being verbally abused and called “Taliban”;
- You see a post by a friend on social media suggesting all asylum seekers are Islamic terrorists

Through these discussions participants also learnt something about the significance of some religious garments and how a victim might feel if they were removed, as well as exploring practical steps that might be taken to support the victim and what their risks and impact might be.



Participants shared their group’s ideas in plenary sessions and these ideas were then categorised by one of our speakers into a [scheme developed by Youth Link Scotland](#) called the 5 Ds of Intervention. Ideas were focussed on how to best protect and show solidarity with the victim, sometimes in quite simple ways (like going and standing next to them). Participants found the ‘5 Ds’ scheme particularly useful as a way of thinking through various options and remembering them in stressful situations. Ideas were recorded to be shared with participants and with a wider audience via social media and our mailing list – so that more people could gain from their practical learning on “how to be an upstander.”



*Resource by Youth Link Scotland*



### The '5 Ds' of Intervention

1. **Direct** – taking direct action to intervene, speaking directly to the perpetrator
2. **Distract** – distracting attention away from the victim, or distracting the victim from the situation
3. **Delegate** – find or call for help from someone else passing on the responsibility to act
4. **Document** – making a record of what is happening
5. **Delay** – waiting and checking on a victim after the incident is over

*Resource by Youth Link Scotland*

Participants were also given a credit card sized card with the “5 D’s of intervention,” developed by Youth Link Scotland, to take away with them, as a reminder of the options available to them and of their learning at this event participants gave their feedback via an anonymous evaluation form. Feedback included such comments as: “A good opportunity to explore and practical strategies to address an important social concern...that doesn’t get spoken about enough” and all participants indicated that they were now more likely to act if they were to witness a hate incident, stating, for example, “I would act much more bravely now as I have learned so much”. They reflected that it was “very enriching to imagine the situations” and that they had gained “practical strategies” and confidence. They

also felt they had increased their understanding, both of “the real experiences of victims” and of each other, reflecting that “the opportunity to hear directly from people of other faiths/races about their experiences was very useful”. Some also stated that they had gained an “increased feeling of support,” and of sharing “common interests” with people from different backgrounds.

“I learned a lot and feel more confident standing up and more informed about issues that affect people of different faiths and races”



One participant, who themselves had been the victim of a hate crime, reflected that the event had been an “opportunity to consider how to heal”. Participants felt the topic itself was vital – both here in Glasgow and around the world, and it was suggested that “every workplace/school/friend group should have a chance to go to this event”.

# *Together in a Crisis: Faith and Climate Change*

St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art  
Sunday 9 February, 1 - 4.15pm

As the urgency of the climate crisis becomes increasingly apparent and the scale of impending suffering and loss more widely understood, and as Glasgow prepares to host the COP26 UN Climate Summit in November, this event invited people from diverse backgrounds to come together for dialogue on some key aspects of the climate challenge and to explore what an effective interfaith response might look like.

In the last few years awareness has risen sharply of the scale and urgency of the global challenge we face:

- 200 species become extinct every day
- a football-pitch-size swathe of rainforest is destroyed every second
- a rubbish truck load of plastic is dumped in the ocean every minute
- the devastating effects of climate change and extreme weather conditions are felt daily, especially by the world's poorest
- and global carbon emissions have risen by more than 60% since the first UN climate summit in 1995 and continue to rise, despite scientific predictions of irreversible catastrophe if we do not reduce our emissions by at least 50% within the next decade.



The scale of the problem can seem overwhelming and it is easy to feel powerless, so – as with the other events in this WIHW trilogy - we wanted to hone in on what we *can* do and, in particular, what we can do *together*, by reaching out across religious and cultural boundaries.

As Rose (CEO of Interfaith Glasgow) noted in her opening address at the start of the event, faith

communities have particular resources to bring to bear when it comes to addressing the climate crisis constructively:

- (1) Religious narratives can articulate compellingly why we should care about the climate crisis, whether that's put in terms of the wonder of God's creation and our stewardship of it; our interconnectedness with all of nature; or simply the demands of compassion.
- (2) Faith traditions offer helpful perspectives on the root *causes* of the crisis – Buddhists, for example, speak of 'the three poisons' of greed, hatred, and

delusion – and about the spiritual transformation necessary to free ourselves from the grip of these vices so that we can live with greater wisdom and compassion.

- (3) Religions have powerful spiritual and pastoral resources to bring to bear when it comes to the potentially debilitating grief, anxiety, and despair many feel with respect to the climate crisis.
- (4) At a very practical level, faith traditions have the power to motivate and mobilise large social networks so as to bring about effective and joined up social action.

Rose went on to point out, however, that the event was not just for people of faith but for everyone: “it’s about *all of us*, from whatever backgrounds we come, bringing whatever resources we have to the shared challenge that faces us. Because if there *are* to be solutions, they will involve us all or they will be no solutions at all”.



“Religions... are often perceived as conflicting with each other. I am myself non-religious... and it was a pleasure to see all these people bringing amazing ideas together”

The event was fully booked with over 50 people from diverse faith and belief backgrounds attending, including Glasgow’s new Lord Provost, Councillor Philip Braat. The intention of the event was to enable people to explore in more detail the resources that we – as people from different faith and belief backgrounds – can bring to bear when it comes to the climate crisis; to engage in dialogue about some key dimensions of the challenge, sharing our various perspectives on the issues raised; and to think about what practical steps we might take together in the months to come.

The format was designed to give a broad introduction to various issues relating to the climate crisis. These issues ranged from very practical concerns in relation to encouraging lifestyle change and engagement with COP26, to more emotional and ideological issues relating, for example, to addressing the grief, anxiety, and despair many feel with respect to the climate crisis, and the question of what forms of direct action might be permissible, given the urgency of the situation. Participants heard from four speakers, as a catalyst for these discussions:

### Speakers

Zarina Ahmad, CEMVO Scotland:

***What can we do together to encourage lifestyle change?***

Nick Cullen, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland:

***How can we facilitate interfaith engagement with COP26?***

Rev David Coleman, Eco Congregation Scotland:

***How can we counter despair and anxiety and foster hope and resilience?***

Bill Crook, Earth Holders, Edinburgh Inter Faith Association:

***What forms of civil action are appropriate?***

Discussions were lively and challenging, and many ideas were shared for ways in which we might work together across religious and cultural boundaries. All ideas shared in plenary sessions were recorded to be shared with participants.

In evaluation forms, participants said that they gained a lot from the event; praising the opportunity to share ideas and work together with a diverse group that brought lots of different insights. People felt they had come to understand more about “how the faith communities are coming together to tackle climate change” and “inspired” by the idea of different faiths uniting in facing this problem. Many reflected on the fact that different religious traditions all include concern for the environment within their teachings

and scriptures in some way or other. And many felt that coming together on this issue would encourage dialogue, co-operation, and strengthen communities; as well as making climate action more effective.

One participant wrote: “shared love for our planet shows the strength of faith communities in this area”. Another said: “it is important to engage people from all backgrounds. We are all human and we are all fighting for our survival on planet earth. Together, as one community, we can stand strong and ensure that we meet the challenges associated with the climate crisis”.

The event was described as a “breath of fresh air” and one longstanding climate activist said they felt “reinvigorated” by “seeing people from such diverse backgrounds coming together to build a community with the goal of tackling climate change, biodiversity loss, and all the interconnected effects”.

Our hope is that the discussions had during this WIHW event will inspire future interfaith dialogues and collaborations in Glasgow as COP26 approaches. Indeed, building on suggestions made at the event, this work has already begun.







## ***New Scots Welcome Gala***

***For Refugees, Asylum Seekers and New Migrants***

Castlemilk Community Church  
Saturday 22 February, 12 - 4pm

The final event in our WIHW 'Thinking Globally, Acting Locally' trilogy addressed the need to welcome and support the growing number of people displaced by conflict and poverty by modelling what a warm welcome might look like through the delivery of a special 'New Scots Welcome Gala'. Glasgow is home to more asylum seekers than any other city in the UK. Many newcomers arrive here without much English, little or no money, and suffering the effects of trauma. As a result, many experience severe social isolation. We wanted to offer a warm interfaith welcome and to combat social isolation by creating a social context in which new friends could be made and supportive community connections developed. To do this, our WIHW 'New Scots Welcome Gala' was created as a free, festive family-orientated event which brought people together to share a meal, find out about the community support available in the South East of Glasgow, and engage in fun activities together.

"We enjoyed the family-friendly and inclusive atmosphere"



We collaborated with a local faith community, Castlemilk Community Church, who provided the venue and additional volunteers for the event. A delicious hot meal was provided, and – with the help of a grant from Glasgow City Council - travel expenses were reimbursed so that poverty was not barrier to participation.

The event was fully booked and busy! Approximately 130 people attended overall, including 101 people from refugee backgrounds (39 adults and 62 children), as well as some people from the local community and congregation, and volunteers from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. The event was delivered by Interfaith Glasgow’s ‘Weekend Club’ volunteers (an interfaith team of volunteers who deliver smaller events for refugees, asylum seekers, and new migrants throughout the year) with



support from volunteers based at Castlemilk Community Church. The event was opened by representatives of Interfaith Glasgow and Castlemilk Community Church, followed by James Dornan, a local MSP (Member of the Scottish Parliament); and closed by Interfaith Glasgow’s Chair, Philip Mendelsohn from the Jewish community.

“We were really impressed with the enthusiasm of everyone involved and we loved being part of such a vibrant event”

Activities were designed to introduce refugees, asylum seekers, and new migrants to the rich diversity of the South East of Glasgow and to showcase some of the wonderful local groups, projects, and services available to them. One local

organisation, ‘Jeely Piece’, provided playworkers to deliver structured, fun sessions for the children on the theme of ‘harmony’ (see the photo of the tree of hands). And volunteers from Castlemilk Church gave out children’s goody bags. In total we had ten projects attend, including: Bike4Good (a project that lends out bikes); the Poverty Alliance (which supports people in poverty); Music Broth (which introduces people to musical instruments and lends







them out); Milk Café (a social enterprise empowering refugee and migrant women), who provided hot soup; High Rise Bakers (a local integration project), who baked bread for us and led a biscuit-decorating activity for children; Al Khair Foundation (a Muslim charity who run a local foodbank); and Community Links staff from the NHS who are keen to engage

with refugees in the area. Information was also provided about how to get involved in Interfaith Glasgow’s activities and women’s groups also shared information about their services, as did local housing associations. And organisations dealing with refugee issues were on hand to answer questions and share expertise.

At the end of the event, participants from the various organisations involved filled in a questionnaire about their experience of the event. Feedback was very positive and included reflections such as: “We wanted to meet organisations working in the local community and were able to do so. We enjoyed meeting people and seeing people having fun”; and “We



hope to make our charity known to those from different backgrounds. We loved how there were lots of people from diverse backgrounds and we learned a lot”.



Participants from refugee backgrounds wrote their comments on sticky notes on a ‘graffiti wall’. These included such comments as: “I liked it because I painted, and I got a lot of candy!”; “So friendly and sociable – it was fabulous”; “Lovely please do this again – It was fun!”; “I liked the activities”; “Lovely atmosphere and everyone was friendly!”

This trilogy of events for World Interfaith Harmony Week 2020 was extremely well received. For example, Glasgow's Lord Provost, Philip Braat, praised the "range and depth of engagement", while James Dornan MSP (Member of Scottish Parliament), said that he was "deeply impressed" by our "innovative means of bringing different faiths together".

We believe that it is vital for Glasgow's diverse communities to have opportunities to engage with one another on the issues that affect us all. We are grateful to World Interfaith Harmony Week for providing that platform, so that people here can feel connected to a truly global interfaith movement. It is particularly important for us to develop that perspective this year as Glasgow prepares to host COP26, the international UN conference on Tackling Climate Change. As City Councillor Graham Campbell says: "World Interfaith Harmony Week offers the perfect opportunity for different faith viewpoints to engage on issues of people and planet as we all prepare for COP26". He goes on to say: Interfaith Glasgow "provides the only space I know where people from multiple faith perspectives have an open space to address major issues that have an impact locally and globally that is worthy of international recognition". We will continue to work to develop that "open space", in faithfulness to our maxim that "interfaith is for everyone".