



ISSUE 51

faith

INITIATIVE

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

CELEBRATING OUR 23RD YEAR

**"When you
begin to see that
your enemy is
suffering, that is
the beginning of
insight"**

Thich Nhat Hanh

The Souls Journey

Assisted Dying

Raising Hope

Honouring the Legacy of Pope Francis

Shared Joy

A Time to Celebrate

WINNER
SHAP AWARD 2011

Spirit of Peace

Spirit of peace, come to our waiting world;
Throughout the nations, may your voice be heard.
Unlock the door of hope, for you hold the key;
Spirit of peace, come to our world.

Spirit of love, come to our waiting world;
Throughout the nations, may your voice be heard.
Unlock the door of hope, for you hold the key;
Spirit of love, come to our world.

Spirit of strength, come to our waiting world;
Throughout the nations, may your voice be heard.
Unlock the door of hope, for you hold the key;
Spirit of strength, come to our world.

Spirit of light, come to our waiting world;
Throughout the nations, may your voice be heard.
Unlock the door of hope, for you hold the key;
Spirit of light, come to our world.

Spirit of God, come to our waiting world;
Throughout the nations, may your voice be heard.
Unlock the door of hope, for you hold the key;
Spirit of God, come to our world.
Spirit of God, come to our world.

Geoffrey Gardner



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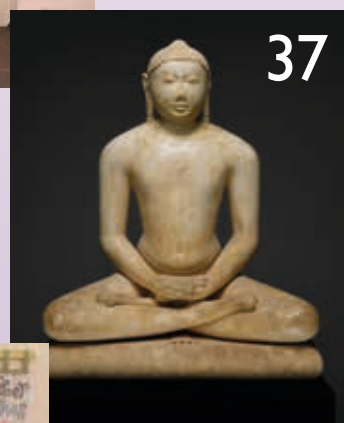
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editorial

**“Give me your tired, your poor.
Your huddled masses yearning
to breathe free...”**

These are the powerful words, written by Emma Lazarus in 1883 and inscribed on the Statue of Liberty to welcome seafaring refugees and migrants to the United States of America in the early part of the 20th century. They have become synonymous over the years with the USA as the land of opportunity and solace for those suffering persecution and discrimination in their own lands. Yet the face that is now being presented to refugees and migrants by the USA is an extremely hostile and exclusive one that seeks to hinder and harm rather than help. Sadly, this hostility is reflected also by other nations across the globe as they threaten to close their borders to strangers, including our own. Undoubtedly, we are living in difficult times of great sorrow and it is painful to reflect on how little we can reach out to help others, yet it is absolutely vital that we are not rendered speechless in the face of such suffering. We have to seek opportunities to try to make a difference, no matter how small, and National Interfaith Week, 9th – 16th November, promises time and space to create relationships that can be life changing. We are giving extra focus in the magazine to impactful interfaith work that is happening behind the scenes throughout the year. Work such as that of the Interfaith Restorative Justice Project, a triple partnership, which has carried out research following the disturbing riots in the UK in summer 2024. Whilst it is recognised that widespread misinformation fuelled the unrest, their researchers found that it was the individual and collective courage of members of the diverse faith communities in the cities most affected that created calm and a greater mood for listening amongst the crowd. Ultimately, this reduced the violence at the time and led to a strong bond being formed between faith communities. Artist Nat Moss found inspiration in such an event and painted the image you now see on the front cover, I felt particularly moved by the painting as it conveys great empathy and hope between two strangers. Hope definitely lies within the image and also in the work of our keynote writer Zerbano Gifford. Zerbano is founder of the ASHA Centre where focus is given to the training of young people to engage in peace building leadership, a role that the world is screaming out for. I say that with deep emotion as I write this in the days awaiting a response from Hamas to the American-led peace proposal on the halting of the IDF catastrophic bombing of Gaza and the return of the Israeli hostages. The prayers for peace featured in the magazine are deeply meant.

Heather Wells

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www.faithinitiative.co.uk

Initiative Interfaith Trust

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Trustees: Heather Wells, Lorna Douglas
and Charanjit Ajit Singh

Object:

The promotion of religious harmony by: Providing educational resources and information to promote a better awareness of the causes and consequences of inter-religious tensions and conflicts; and educating the public in the diverse nature of religious belief.

Faith Initiative: Embracing Diversity Magazine

Editorial Panel

Editor: Heather Wells

Co-Editor and Design Consultant: Lorna Douglas

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Charanjit Ajit Singh

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Sr Maureen Goodman

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Poet in residence: Rebecca Irvine Bilkau

Aim: The aim of the magazine is to open windows on the beliefs and practices of people of different faiths and cultures: to foster understanding and reduce racially and religiously motivated violence.

Statement: Whilst the contents of this magazine will always be in accordance with the 'object' of Initiative Interfaith Trust, there will be freedom of expression.

Invitation: We invite you to contribute articles, poems, letters, artwork and responses so that the magazine reflects the religious communities it seeks to serve.

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Issue 52 Themes:

1. Symbols and Signs of Peace
2. Collaborative Interfaith Work

Front cover image: 'All You Need is Love'

by Nat Moss www.natmoss1986.wixsite.com/website

Front cover quote: Cited from *Peace is Every-Step:
The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*

Back cover: SHIP by Anna Gillespie

www.annagillespie.co.uk Instagram: annagillespiesculpture

Design & Print: Reeds T: 01768 864 214

SPIRAL: "This is an ancient symbol that reminds us of the womb and the protective mothering nature in all of us. It takes us from the broad sweeps of the outer life to an infinitely small centre where we cease to exist."

Cited:
Mandalas: Spiritual Circles for Harmony & Fulfilment
Laura J.Vatts (2002) Pub.Hermes House,
London ISBN 184308 973 7

The spiral logo was designed by Caroline Jariwala
for Initiative Interfaith Trust

In the Spirit of Renewal and Ethical Action



We are living through a time of profound unravelling. Young people; bright, brave, beautiful souls, are overwhelmed. They are anxious, depressed, and disoriented in a world that often seems to offer more chaos than clarity. The pace is relentless, the noise deafening, the values confused. And yet, in the midst of this, I still believe in hope. Not as a fragile wish, but as an eternal law.

That is why we built the ASHA Centre. A place where young people come home to themselves. ASHA has multiple meanings. In Sanskrit and Hindi, it translates as *Hope*. In Hebrew, it means *fortunate*, and in Arabic and Swahili, it means *life* and *one who lives well*. In Persian, *adornment* and *beauty*. In my Zoroastrian faith, it is the main concept signifying order, truth and righteousness. I thought that would sum up the centre that would change lives and be a little paradise for all. And it is in this spirit, of sacred renewal and ethical action, that the ASHA Centre was born.

We created a sanctuary in Gloucestershire's Forest of Dean, where young people from all over the world, Christian and Hindu, Israeli and Palestinian, privileged and refugee, can come together. Not just to learn, but to unlearn the divisions that have been placed upon them. Not just to be heard, but to be held.

Because I know this in my bones. When you offer young people genuine love, deep listening, and the space to breathe, they begin to heal.

Real leadership begins with the Heart. So much of what passes for "leadership" today is about titles and noise. But true leadership, the kind that changes lives, begins in silence. In integrity. In the courage to ask, *Who am I really? What am I here to give?*

At ASHA, we do not create followers. We awaken leaders. Through ethical leadership programs, theatre, music, storytelling, and reflection, our young people learn to face the world not with armour, but with soul. They speak the truth. They question. They build. And they do it together, across borders and boundaries that once seemed insurmountable.

We do not ask people to abandon their roots.
We ask them to honour their neighbours.





Art and creativity are not luxuries. They are lifelines. Something sacred happens when a young person sings their sorrow, dances their story, or plants a tree that will outlive them. They remember who they are.

When I was young, I lived between many worlds, India, England, ancient faiths, and modern struggles. It taught me that difference is not a threat. It is a gift.

At the ASHA Centre, we bring together Jains and Quakers, Christians and Bahá'ís, Buddhists and Sikhi's, Agnostics and Zoroastrians; not to convert, but to connect. We do not ask people to abandon their roots. We ask them to honour their neighbours. And in doing so, they learn the great secret: *We are one family.*

To witness a young Israeli and a young Palestinian cook a meal together, laugh together, cry together, create a play together, that they take back to their homeland, to bring the communities together for the first time, is to see the future being rewritten.

There is a reason we built the ASHA Centre on five acres of sacred land, in the Forest of Dean, near St. Anthony's Well. We know that the earth and water themselves are healers. When our young people tend the soil, plant herbs and vegetables or simply walk the rose garden path in stillness, they remember their place in the web of life.

In a world that teaches consumption, we teach contribution.

Our focus on sustainable living is not just ecological. It is moral. It is spiritual. Climate grief is real, especially among the young. But when they see that their actions matter, that they can heal the land and their own hearts, despair gives way to agency. That is resilience.

Mental health is not just a clinical issue. It is a cultural one. It is what happens when we sever young people from meaning, purpose, beauty, and belonging. At the ASHA Centre, we restore the golden threads that bind us together.

We give young people tools to calm their nervous systems, yes, but more importantly, we give them reasons to live. Reasons to act. Reasons to believe. I have seen it. Again and again. A young person arrives broken by the world. They leave, glowing. Changed. Ready. We need more ASHAs in the world.

My dream is not just one centre in one forest. My dream is a world where every young person has access to this kind of sacred space. A place where they can meet themselves with honesty and hope. A place where they are reminded: You are not alone. You are not powerless. You are not lost.

There is an eternal law running through your veins. There is a spark of divine justice in your voice. There is a fierce hope if we choose to act with courage and kindness.

With love and hope,

Zerbanoo Gifford

REMEMBER THEM

Do you know what happens when a crow dies?
I have seen what happens when a crow dies.
All the other crows in the neighbourhood
Hover over the dead with nervous shrieks.
They caw to alert their mates that one of them is no more.
And from as far as the cawing can be heard,
Crows rush to the scene to join in the grief.
Crows are not the only birds that express their communal sorrow
Magpies, ravens and scrub-jays flaunt their loss loudly, too.
They are known to bring twigs to the dead.
But the displaced people of Gaza, whose homes and
communities are being destroyed, are denied that
instinctive sharing of grief and sorrow: neighbours and
families are dead or dispersed across the flattened land,
and there is no healing.

Do you know what happens when a chimpanzee dies?
The distressed chimps clean the remains,
And refuse to leave its side.
And elephants?
Elephants stroke the lifeless body,
And keep a vigil over it,
Even when it's turned into a carcass.
But in contrast, the starving children of Gaza have become
daily flashing images across our screens, and are slowly
dying, ignored and neglected by world leaders who have
the Power but not the Will to help.

Seals gather to mourn their dead, as well.
If it's a pup, seals slap their flippers and wail.
Mother seals guard their dead pup for days.
Dolphins express distress and grief,
While mother dolphins carry their dead calf
on their backs or heads for over a fortnight.

Now think of the heartbroken mothers of Gaza, stripped of
everything needed to sustain human life, who carry the
emaciated and broken bodies of their children swathed in
a white shroud to a mass grave.

Remember the people of **PALESTINE**,
Remember the traumatized children
Of Gaza, Rafah, Hebron,
Khan Younis, and the West Bank -
Who are scarred for life in ways beyond our imagination.

Remember the WCNSF: 'Wounded Child, No Surviving Family'.
Know their history and their proud heritage,
Because generations of children to come,
will surely ask about THEM.
and question why the world betrayed THEM.

SHIP

A MEETING OF PAST AND PRESENT A MEETING OF LAND AND SEA

In 2015, images of Syrian refugees travelling across Europe flooded our TV screens and newspapers. The images were startling, and even induced some fear as “hoards” of mainly young men, carrying almost nothing with them and seemingly willing to risk everything, made their way towards “us”. But it always struck me that when the cameras did bother to zoom in and journalists interviewed these men, the crowd immediately dissolved into individuals – people who could have been one’s brother, son or friend. Each had their own story and was acting as we would have done if we found ourselves in their position.

As the news reportage continued, I asked myself what it takes to recognise a fellow human being in these circumstances. I made a sculpture called *What It Takes* consisting of eleven life-size, minimally ‘sketched’ figures, only really their faces and their boots defined. In addition to the question of *What It Takes*

to recognise a fellow human being, I have also, since reading the *Dairies* of Anne Frank as a young girl, been interested in the question of ‘what it takes’ to have the courage to leave almost everything one knows behind in order to survive. – why some people leave and some stay. Would I have that courage myself?

In 2017 Chris Buttler of Castle Fine Arts Foundry saw the sculpture *What It Takes* and asked if I would like to contribute a temporary installation to a large plinth he had charge of, as part of a general regeneration effort, near his foundry in inner city Liverpool. I made a group of seven seated figures who were simply ‘Waiting’. As if the figures who were previously depicted walking were now sat ‘Waiting’. They had arrived at their destination but were now subject to the limbo of statelessness as many refugees are even when they reach their destination.



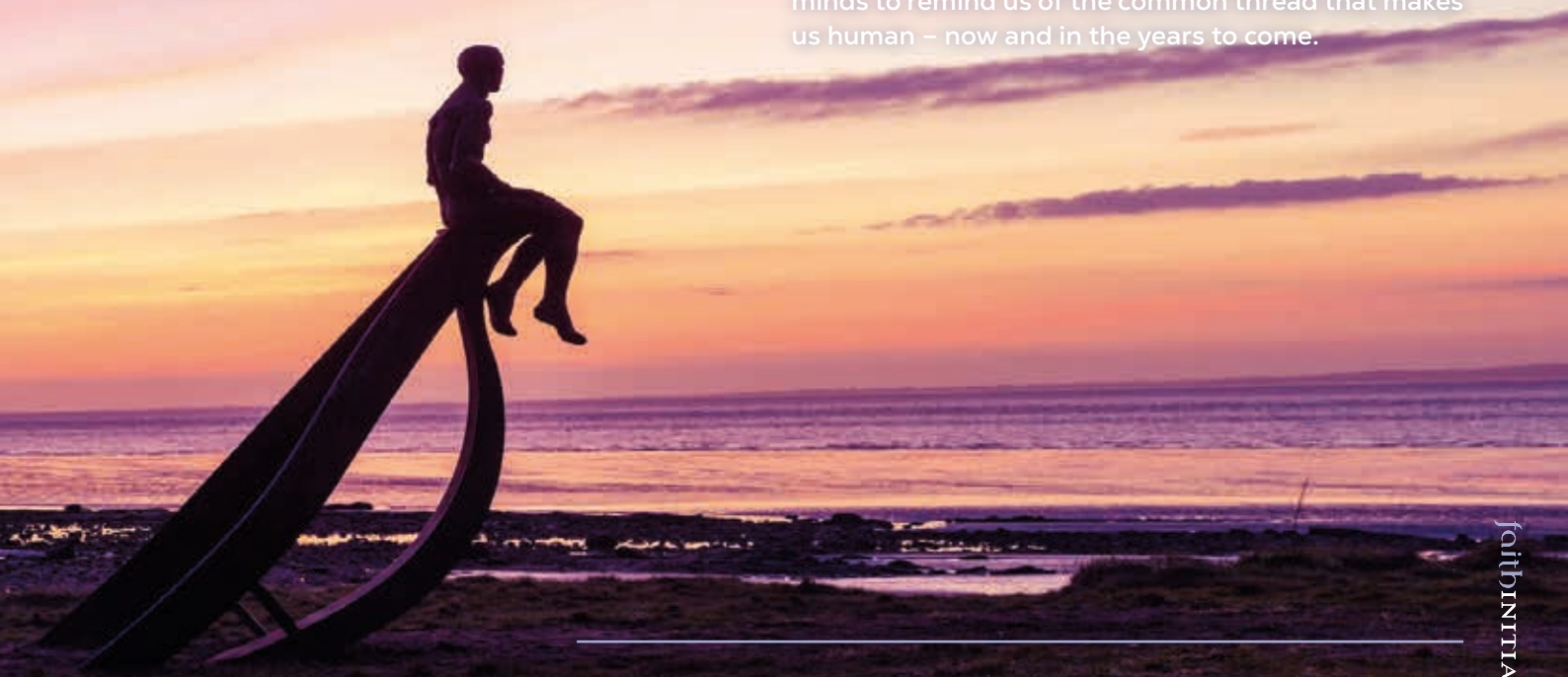
"THE FIGURES FACE DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS AS A REMINDER THAT REFUGEES GO AS WELL AS COME; THAT MANY OF US WHO CONSIDER OURSELVES NATIVE HAVE PARENTS A GENERATION OR TWENTY GENERATIONS BACK WHO WERE REFUGEES THEMSELVES"

In 2018 the Morecambe Bay Partnership, a charity which seeks to reinvigorate the Morecambe Bay area through eco-tourism and promoting the area as a linked eco-system offered me a commission to create a sculpture near Heysham Head as part of their Headlands to Headspace project. I immediately took to the site, the wild beauty of the coast reminding me of my father's journey as an 'economic refugee' from Ireland back in the 1940s. The Viking heritage of the area was also vividly alive for me after recent trips to both Iceland and Norway.

From the earliest Roman and Viking settlers to travellers boarding Irish Sea ferries in the present day, Heysham, Lancashire has long been a strategic point of arrival, departure and human settlement. Ultimately the sculpture SHIP was built a few hundred meters south of Heysham at Half Moon Bay. The sculpture is in sight of Heysham Port, celebrates Morecambe Bay's landscape and maritime heritage, and reflects the importance of seaborne trade in bringing news, innovation and shaping the character of the area.

Symbolically positioned on the boundary between land and sea, benefitting from dramatic backdrops of the tides, horizon and stunning coastal sunsets, the outline of a ship's hull is mounted with two opposing figures at each end. One figure faces north and 'the old' - the ancient monument of the 8th century St Patrick's Chapel, which marks the place where St Patrick is said to have landed after his voyage from Ireland. The other figure faces south to 'the new' - the industrialism of modern docks, Heysham Nuclear Power Station and wind turbines.

As well as trying to capture something of the timelessness of seafaring, the figures face different directions as a reminder that refugees go as well as come; that many of us who consider ourselves native have parents a generation or twenty generations back who were refugees themselves. In the centre of SHIP is a block of locally quarried stone designed as a place of rest and contemplation for all who may pass that way. I hope SHIP is somewhere where the meeting of the land and the vastness of the sea, and the meeting of past and present, will open hearts and minds to remind us of the common thread that makes us human - now and in the years to come.



Raising Hope

Honouring the Legacy of Pope Francis and Looking Towards Season of Creation 2025

Pope Francis died on 21st April 2025, in the 10th anniversary year of his groundbreaking Encyclical “**Laudato Si**”. Across the globe, communities paused, not only to mourn but to reflect on the profound legacy of a pontiff who dared to speak of “*integral ecology*”, who lifted up the poor and the earth in one breath and who reminded us that hope is not a luxury but a responsibility.



A Pope for the Planet and the People

Pope Francis's vision was never narrowly religious. It was boldly incarnational. Through “*Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*”, he reshaped the Catholic Church's teaching on ecology, not merely as environmental concern but as a call to conversion, relationship and justice. He saw the earth not as a backdrop to human affairs, but as a sister; as a mother groaning in labour alongside the poor and the forgotten.



Pope Francis

Since the publication of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis' encyclical has inspired tangible action. Across the world, dioceses have launched creation care offices, parishes have adopted sustainability practices and thousands have taken part in training to become *Laudato Si* Animators, equipping local leaders to promote ecological conversion. The Catholic Bishops in Ireland responded concretely when on 24th August 2018, the eve of Pope Francis' visit to Ireland, they signed the global Catholic fossil free pledge, saying, “*Today begins the process of divesting our resources from all fossil fuels. In doing so, we are responding directly to Pope Francis' call in his 2015 encyclical letter Laudato Si by moving away from fossil fuels “without delay” (paragraph 165). Together with our brothers and sisters in the Church of Ireland and with many Religious Congregations in Ireland that have already divested, we now call on all faith organisations at home and abroad to consider joining the global divestment movement.*”

Dedicated websites such as that of the “*Laudato Si* Movement” and the “*Laudato Si* Action Platform” offer resources, guidance and a shared space for faith communities to engage in long-term ecological commitment. In Northern Ireland, both diocesan structures and community based networks have embraced this call through education, dialogue and advocacy. In 2024, the **Join the Dots Together** (JTDT) initiative organised a series of events during Season of Creation (1st September to 4th October), that offered both prophetic challenge and practical hope. These included panel discussions on agriculture and creation, environmental justice and ethics and the spiritual roots of ecological awareness.

hope is not a luxury
but a responsibility

One of the most striking moments came during the “**Our Voices Matter**” (See Faith Initiative No. 50) youth forum at Queen’s University Belfast (19th September), where students met with political representatives to speak candidly about their hopes for the future. Some spoke of climate anxiety, others of the disconnect between leadership and lived experience. The event created a space for genuine listening, something Pope Francis repeatedly urged when he said: “*Realities are greater than ideas*” (Evangelii Gaudium, 231).

Another significant development was the interest inspired by Dr. Raja Harun, in “**Al Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth**”, a significant document that offers an Islamic perspective on caring for the environment. Released in 2024 by a coalition of Islamic scholars, environmental experts and institutions, it serves as a global call to action rooted in Islamic theology, ethics and law. Dr. Harun was one of the speakers at the JTDT conference which took place in the Belfast South Methodist Church and Agape Centre on 20th September. This interest sparked a series of small, diverse gatherings hosted by the



Students of Rathmore Grammar School address the congregation of St Brigid’s Belfast on their Laudato Si’ journey

Northern Ireland Interfaith Forum, where people came together to read and reflect on “Al-Mizan”, fostering dialogue across faiths around shared care for creation.

Preparing the Ground: Season of Creation 2025

Now, as we turn toward Season of Creation 2025, networks like JTDT are preparing once more to be catalysts for connection and action. The theme this year, “**Peace with Creation**”, draws on Isaiah 32 and invites us to reflect on the link between ecological balance and lasting peace. The passage speaks of a time when deserts bloom, justice dwells in the wilderness and people live in secure, undisturbed places.

It is a vision of harmony not yet realised, but one we are called to work toward. JTDT, in collaboration with faith leaders, educators and interfaith partners, is planning a series of events to explore this theme. Among them:

- A TikTok competition for youth, run in collaboration with the Westcourt Centre, Belfast (part of the Edmund Rice network), inviting young people to creatively engage with the message of Laudato Si’.
- A youth and politicians’ forum, building on last year’s success, again planned for Queen’s University Belfast (3rd October 2025).

- A seminar series, to be hosted in diverse faith venues, touching on themes such as:
 - Ecological justice and global debt
 - Climate migration and peacebuilding
 - Water and Nature
 - Lifestyle and Health: Reflections on how we live, consume and care
 - Faith in Action: Encouraging faith communities to “use their voice”

These events are not merely informative, they are invitational. They seek to draw people into a deeper dialogue between faith and action, contemplation and commitment. They also reflect JTDT’s ethos: that change begins in conversation, that everybody’s story matters and that even complex issues become navigable when approached in community.

Hope is a Verb

Throughout his pontificate, Pope Francis insisted that hope was not an abstract sentiment but a concrete posture of resistance to despair. Early in his papacy he warned, “*Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope*” (Evangelii Gaudium, paragraph 86). In “**Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship**”, written in the shadow of a global pandemic, he returned to this conviction with urgency, describing hope as something “*deeply rooted in every human heart*” (paragraph 55). In this document, as in his many public gestures, e.g. meeting with refugees, dining with the poor and embracing the disabled, Francis painted a vision of a world where dignity is not conditional, and belonging is not selective. He insisted that

fraternity is the antidote to conflict, that dialogue is stronger than ideology and that peace is made in the patient work of encounter.

It is no surprise that one of his most courageous acts as a peacebuilder was the signing of the **Document on Human Fraternity** in Abu Dhabi in 2019, alongside Grand Imam Ahmed el-Tayeb¹. That document rejects violence in the name of religion and affirms that “*religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility or extremism*”. It remains a blueprint for interreligious cooperation and a challenge to all faith communities to become artisans of reconciliation.

We are not living in an era of change but a change of era

Raising Hope Together

The theme of the **2025 Laudato Si' Week**, which took place from 24th-31st May, was "**Raising Hope**". It encapsulates the heart of the journey ahead. In Northern Ireland, one of the most vibrant expressions of this hope came through the Down and Connor Catholic Diocese, which hosted its first diocesan Laudato Si' conference on 25th May, a landmark event that crowned a rich programme of local engagement.

This diocesan initiative reflected a deepening commitment to ecological conversion and community dialogue, inspired by Pope Francis's vision. Events leading up to and surrounding the conference included a special Mass, a public screening of *The Letter, A Message for our Earth* film², a scenic walk of reflection, a photographic exhibition, a 'World Café' event and a poetry gathering featuring voices of both children and adults. In a moving gesture of environmental and spiritual solidarity, Bishop Alan McGuckian planted a tree as a living sign of commitment to care for our common home. Young people also played a key role, speaking at a weekday Mass in a Belfast Catholic Parish and bringing fresh urgency to the call for ecological justice.

This unfolding diocesan engagement adds a powerful ecclesial dimension to local action and complements the work of other

networks such as JTDT, ensuring that the legacy of Pope Francis continues to take root in parish life, liturgy, education and public witness.

Pope Francis once said: "*We are not living in an era of change but a change of era*" (Florence, 10th November 2015). In this era, the Church and indeed all people of goodwill, are called to walk alongside one another, across faiths and differences, listening to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor and allowing both to transform us.

In the spirit of his words, all are invited to take part in this year's Season of Creation events, wherever we are: to lend our voice, share our skills, offer our questions and join our hands with others seeking a more just and joyful world. Whether you are a young activist, a seasoned educator, a curious parishioner or someone simply searching for connection, your presence matters.

As we remember Pope Francis with gratitude, let us honour his legacy not with platitudes and nostalgia but with action and achievements. Let us keep raising hope in memory, in mission and in the belief that another way is not only possible, but already beginning to take root.



Bishop Alan McGuckian and Fr Eugene O'Hagan aided by pupils from St Josephs Primary School, Carryduff plant a tree to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Laudato Si'



Pupils from St Bride's Primary School share their poetry and reflections on Laudato Si' with members of St Brigid's Parish Community Association

Juanita Majury is a member of Focolare Movement and 'Join the Dots Together' Steering Group.

- 1 Grand Imam of al-Azhar al-Sharif, one of the world's most influential centres of Sunni Islamic scholarship, Chairman of the Muslim Council of Elders.
- 2 "The Letter" is a powerful documentary film inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home. Released in 2022 and produced in collaboration with the Laudato Si' Movement and the Vatican's Dicastery for Communication, the film brings to life the core message of the encyclical through the stories of people from around the world who are most affected by the ecological crisis <https://theletterfilm.org/>

Last Offices

And when you are 84 or more, and leave your body behind,
I will wife you in the old ways. I will hum one of the songs
we motorwayed together, so any lingering echo of you
feels cosy and never alone. I will fetch that Victorian basin,
the one we hate so fondly, and fill it with warm water
scented with five drops of sandalwood oil, five of bergamot.
Still humming, I will sponge your wonky nose,
your melon-pale skin. Your hair I will tend with my fingers
– you prefer those to combs – and twirl that persistent
ringlet your mother loved. The nail on your strumming finger
I will leave long, knowing the trouble it took you to grow,
remember you playing guitar, and hum like the clappers.
Eventually, I will stand back, thank you for the refuges
of your perception, your patience, for saying you felt
safe with me. I will apologise for my hot temper, again,
but never for the long, patient crafting of love. I will ask you
what you'd like to wear, guess your answer,
over-rule you on taste grounds, you'd expect no less.
You will notice, I will already be trying all the while
to learn not to say we. It's doubtful I'll manage it.
All these things I will do when you are 84 or more.
That's the deal. Don't you dare get ahead of yourself.

Rebecca Bilkau



The Soul's Journey

Sallekhana: The Jain Approach to Voluntary Death

Only a few years ago, I thought I would never want to die voluntarily. The very idea felt strange—perhaps even wrong. I've always had a strong will to live, to face life's challenges with resilience and hope. But as I grow older, I've started to view the Jain approach to voluntary death in certain, spiritually appropriate circumstances as deeply meaningful. Sallekhana, while little known outside Jainism, carries a quiet dignity and aligns with the tradition's core values. In a world now re-examining assisted dying, this ancient practice deserves closer attention.

Assisted Dying in the UK: A Changing Conversation

The topic of assisted dying continues to provoke moral, legal, and religious debate in the UK. As of July 2025, assisting someone to die remains illegal under the Suicide Act 1961, carrying penalties of up to 14 years in prison.

However, there is growing momentum for change. Earlier this year, Baroness Meacher's Assisted Dying Bill was again introduced in the House of Lords. It proposes that terminally ill, mentally competent adults should be allowed to request medical help to end their lives. Though the bill has not yet become law, public support is strong—over 75% of UK adults now favour reform.

Opinions remain divided. Some see assisted dying as a compassionate response to suffering; others raise concerns about its ethical risks and the value of life. In this complex debate, Jainism offers a unique spiritual lens—focused not on medical intervention but on conscious, peaceful acceptance of death.

What Is Sallekhana (or Santhara)?

Sallekhana—also known as Santhara—is an ancient Jain practice of voluntary and peaceful death. It is not considered suicide, nor is it prompted by despair. Instead, it is a spiritual fast undertaken at life's natural end, when the body can no longer meaningfully function.

The word comes from the Sanskrit for “thinning out”—referring to both the physical act of gradual fasting and the inner letting go of passions, attachments, and karma. The practice is marked by serenity and self-discipline. It may last for days or even weeks and involves reducing food and water intake while focusing on prayer, meditation, and purification.

Sallekhana is typically supported by the Jain community and guided by religious teachers. It includes rituals of forgiveness and detachment, helping the person leave this life in a state of peace.

Spiritual Roots in Jain Philosophy

Jainism is a faith rooted in non-violence, discipline, and the pursuit of liberation (moksha) from the cycle of birth and death. Sallekhana embodies these values:

- **Ahimsa (Non-violence):** Violence in Jainism includes not just physical harm but also acts driven by anger, ego, or desire. Sallekhana, undertaken with calm and detachment, is seen as a peaceful and non-violent act.
- **Aparigraha (Non-attachment):** This practice teaches letting go of all possessions, relationships, and even the body, accepting life's impermanence.
- **Samyak Darshan (Right View):** Death, when faced with spiritual clarity, can aid the soul's journey toward liberation.

Sallekhana must never be motivated by emotional distress or hopelessness. It requires spiritual maturity, self-awareness, and a peaceful acceptance of life's natural end.

Jainism offers a unique spiritual lens—focused not on medical intervention but on conscious, peaceful acceptance of death

Sallekhana, Suicide, and Assisted Dying: Important Differences

Sallekhana may seem similar to assisted dying or suicide, but it is very different in purpose and process. Here are a few distinctions:

Aspect	Suicide	Assisted Dying	Sallekhana
Motivation	Often emotional pain or despair	Relief from terminal suffering	Spiritual detachment and inner purification
State of Mind	Distressed, impulsive	Based on medical advice	Calm, reflective, and spiritually guided
Process	Sudden, self-inflicted	Medical intervention	Gradual fasting with spiritual preparation
Community Role	Usually private	Involves family and healthcare	Guided by Jain teachers and supported by community
Religious Context	Not spiritual	Sometimes ethical, not religious	Deeply religious and ritualised

Sallekhana is not about escaping pain or choosing death. It is about accepting death peacefully, when it is near and inevitable, with a focus on the soul's journey rather than the body's decline.

When Is Sallekhana Undertaken?

Jain ethics set clear conditions for when Sallekhana may be undertaken. It is not a casual decision, and there are strict criteria:

- 1 Terminal Illness or Irreversible Condition:** When the body cannot function meaningfully and death is near.
- 2 Old Age with Decline:** In cases where faculties have irreversibly deteriorated.
- 3 Mental Clarity:** The person must be fully conscious and spiritually aware.
- 4 Voluntary Choice:** It must be the person's own decision, without pressure.
- 5 Ethical Preparation:** The person should have lived a moral life and approach death in a spirit of forgiveness and peace.
- 6 Spiritual Supervision:** Ideally, Sallekhana is guided by a Jain monk or spiritual teacher (Niryapaka), who ensures that it is performed with dignity and discipline.

These safeguards help protect the practice's integrity and ensure it remains a path of devotion, not desperation.

Conclusion: A Sacred Approach to Life and Death

In an age where medicine can prolong life but not always ease suffering, Jainism offers a deeply spiritual perspective on dying. Sallekhana is a voluntary, non-violent, and conscious farewell—neither an escape nor an assertion of control, but a serene acceptance of life's natural close.

While debates around assisted dying grow in the UK, Jain traditions remind us that dying with dignity does not always require medical intervention. Sometimes, it calls for spiritual readiness, self-discipline, and a peaceful heart.

Sallekhana is not only a religious act—it is a profound ethical and philosophical stance. It shows us a different way to understand death: not with fear or resistance, but with grace, clarity, and inner strength.

Ajay Punatar serves as a Trustee of the Institute of Jainology, which represents the UK Jain community by engaging with government, fostering interfaith collaboration, and working with major institutions to raise awareness of the Jain faith.

Assisted

When a person passes away and the family informs relatives, friends and people in the community, in writing and online, it starts with a verse quoted from our scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, “*Ghalley aye Nanaka , suddey utthi jaaye*”. It means “Nanak says that we come into this world when sent and we return when recalled by God.” We are endowed with a certain number of breaths in life which we take and complete, but we don’t know, when the final breath is taken.

In other words, God gave us human life and only God has the ‘right’ to take it away. No one has the ‘right’ to take it away.

As Peggy Morgan says in her introduction to the book ‘Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions’, “The major religious traditions of the world all teach that human life is of great value and should be respected whether the individual is elderly, handicapped, sick, poor, dying or not yet born. In some ways they go even further than this and say that the life experience of some of these people may bring them close to the heart of their religion, in a way that the experience of youth, physical fitness, intellectual ability and wealth do not. The religions also teach us personal qualities which give priority to the practical care of the poor and sick. These include a sense of justice, unselfishness, generosity, love and compassion.”

We accept that human life is a precious gift from God and therefore, it is our duty to have a high respect for life, cherish it and protect it. We are taught that human birth is obtained after countless other life forms and in the words of Guru Amardas, the third Guru “This body is the Lord’s Temple, wherein is revealed the jewel of Divine Comprehension.” (GGS 1346).

We, being human, wear the garments of happiness and suffering and we should bear in mind that human experience is God experience and human suffering is part of that experience.

Experience of both, pain and comfort, or, suffering and happiness (*dukh* and *sukh*) are seen as human experiences leading to the state of ultimate surrender of self to the Will of the Creator, Timeless Being (*Karta*, and *Akal Purakh*).

There has been much concern expressed by most sections of the faith communities about the Assisted Dying Bill in parliament and in the view of many observant Sikhs, assisted dying is to all intents and purposes ‘assisted suicide’ or euthanasia, which the Sikh Gurus rejected as interference in God’s plan.

In their 9th December 2024 response, the Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO) unequivocally opposed the Bill as “an affront to Sikh teachings” and is “state sanctioned suicide.”

“Nanak says that we come into this world when sent and we return when recalled by God.”

Living

“There is strong emphasis in the Sikh moral teaching on compassion, dignity and the care for others and self”

They also felt that there are too many flaws, and even risks, in the argument that an individual has the ‘right to die’ promoted by some politicians and organizations like ‘EXIT’.

On the other hand, there is strong emphasis in the Sikh moral teaching on compassion, dignity and the care for others and self. It also teaches us that we have a duty to protect life in a responsible way. There are many examples about the caring of the sick and dying especially during the Covid period when in Delhi, the Sikh volunteers provided the langar of oxygen, medical aid and food to those who needed it desperately, regardless of their faith and they helped with the respectful cremations or burials of the dead according to the religious tradition of Deceased. They were following the example of Guru Har Krishan, our 8th Guru, only eight years old, who helped those inflicted by smallpox during an epidemic in the seventeenth century. The Guru instilled in the community, the caring for the sick and vulnerable as a sacred duty – he supported the vulnerable and dying with ‘assisted living.’

We are also expected, as people of faith, to serve others with honesty and hard work and as carers of our human community, as well as all that exists in nature. Like the Hindu and Buddhist communities, depending on our deeds, our karma, we believe that we enter the cycle of birth and death. Only the divine judge’s grace can lift us from it.

Suffering, the Gurus said, was part of the operation of karma, and human beings should not only accept it without complaint but act so as to make the best of the situation that karma has given them.

We are also endowed with the ability to pray and it is the power of prayer and the singing of hymns to God, the divine healer that helps us when we and our loved ones and friends face acute suffering and difficult times. Medical treatment can only support so far.

Professor Eleanor Nesbit says, “Certainly, they (Sikhs) would emphasize loving care of any sufferer. Clearly an attempt to end life for financial motives is immoral. There is also no place in Sikh thought for deliberately ending the life of the incurably ill or irreversibly senile. All Sikhs are to accept what God gives as an expression of God’s will. They must also sympathise with those who crave death as an alternative to being a burden on dear ones.”

However, it is important to nurture and maintain the state of ‘Chardi Kala’, eternal optimism I strongly believe that our physical, religious and spiritual life are completely intertwined and a holistic view is important to care for the ‘inner temple of the divine.’

To conclude, not assisted dying but Guru-guided living is the Sikh way.

Charanjit Ajit Singh

This article first featured in issue 23 (2010), we thank the writer for her permission to repeat it under the theme 'ASSISTED DYING'

The Paradox of Love

"Death is not extinguishing the light but putting out the lamp because dawn has come" ¹

Mrs Madhobi Bala Mulnerjee



I was with my 95 years old Ma when she was trying to put out the lamp of life in the firm belief that her dawn had come.

Ma had a fall in August 2009 and broke her hip. After six weeks it was found that although there was some healing, her body had not produced enough callus to make her hip strong. The doctors could do no more and Ma was to be bed-ridden for the rest of her life.

Ma was in her own home in India where she lived with my youngest brother and family. I took leave from my work in England and when I arrived there I found that she had already closed her eyes to the world and had begun her inner journey towards the dawn. She acknowledged my arrival. I had two weeks and I decided to stay with her all her waking hours during that time. I realized that not only in the time of our birth but also in the time of our death we need midwives: I feel I served as midwife to my dying mother.

She was in tune with her dying process. I do not know who taught my mother to welcome her dying process, but she seemed to know what to do. Ma told us, her loved ones, that her time had come. She was preparing herself to meet her maker and in her Gethsemane she wanted her loved ones to be with her. We realized that we should not distract her by talking about ordinary things, but take her dying process seriously and support her.

When Jesus was preparing himself for his death, Peter tried to distract him and this made Jesus angry (Mark 8.31-33), whereas when a woman poured perfume on Jesus' head to prepare him for his burial he was pleased (Mark 14.3-9). I learned that one can help the dying person, not by denying the reality of death, but by acknowledging it.

Ma had no doubt that she was going to be one with Jesus and that would be the best thing that could happen to her. She kept asking us, "When will Jesus take me? Why is he delaying?" For her journey she needed only two things: the company of God and the presence of her loved ones. She began to call her loved ones again and again by name and to call on God through hymns and prayers.

Her unspoken message to us was clear: "stay with me; watch and pray." Hymns and songs were the last things lingering in her memory, giving her the language she needed. In her Gethsemane, through her singing, she was saying,

"Your will be done." Then she asked us to commit her soul to God. We did that. She then committed herself to God. Ma believed that this would enable her to die.

Some days she expressed her fears: the fear of death, because it is completely unknown. She also had a fear of leaving her loved ones behind. Not by denying her fears but by admitting them she overcame them. Prayers and singing, her spiritual exercises, were aiding her.

During the daytime I sat by her bedside. She held my hand tightly. She would pull my face down to shower it with kisses. One day she said, "Come and lie down next to me." I went and lay down. Others in the family asked in surprise, "What are you doing?" As I lay down there we kissed and hugged each other and wept. After this she called my sister and sister-in-law to do the same. One by one we went and lay down beside her and we bathed ourselves in the overflowing love. This process touched us all at a very deep level.

We often hear that we must learn to love our neighbours, but do we ever hear that we must learn to demand and receive love? My Mother taught me that love is a circle which is created when human beings demand, give, receive and return love. Little children naturally create this circle of love. They demand love; the adults give it and the children in their receiving of love return it to the adults. For demanding and receiving love we have to become childlike and show our vulnerability.

Her deep attachment to us was helping her to be detached. The deeper her love was for us, the easier it was for her to let go. She was soaking up our love to be free from the bond of love.

Reflecting back I can see she died a good death—she died well—because she lived well. She loved her life. We might think it is difficult for people to die if they love their life too much. Again I believe there is a paradox here. If we love life, we can love death.

She had a healthy attachment to life. When we know we have lived a good life, death is not so frightening. As her body and mind became feeble, her soul was working overtime.

When all was stripped of her life, we could almost see the essence of her being. Her inner being showed me that a well-developed spirituality was helping her dying process. Her religion, Christianity, certainly helped her. As she had developed a very strong relationship with Jesus, she had no doubt that she was going to him. This was not daunting, but an exciting prospect. It was a great privilege to have a glimpse of her soul.

Ma said she went to her grave twice and came back. I could almost see the threshold between life and death that her soul was constantly trying to cross. My leave ended, it was time to get back to England. I told Ma that I was going back. She asked, "Why don't you wait until I die?" I said I would come back at Christmas. She said, "You won't see me then." We both wept. I said, "Ma, I am not leaving you; I am taking you with me in my heart and you will remain there for eternity."

Her situation deteriorated fast and within five days of my return to England she died. I later learned that on the day she died, she was left alone in her room for only a few minutes, and it was in that moment that she took the opportunity to silently depart. My Baba (father) had done the same. Maybe it is hard to go when your loved ones are holding you tightly.

I was told that when Ma died she looked glorious. In India death is not hidden away. As soon as my mother died people from the neighbourhood, both Hindus and Christians, began to gather.

They washed the body and dressed her in a silk sari she wanted to wear in death. In the courtyard the coffin was made and wrapped beautifully with fabric. Her garlanded body was covered with flowers. There was an all-night vigil. In the morning her body was taken to another town, Krishnagar, to be buried. My Baba had been a priest in that town for many years and was eventually buried there. For years Ma had been writing down her wishes on pieces of paper and had been telling us that she would like to be buried in Baba's grave in Krishnagar.

After the all-night vigil the burial was to take place as soon as possible. In England I woke up at 3.30 am, calculating the time when the journey to Krishnagar would begin. I was shedding tears of grief and joy, thinking that the great journey had begun, the journey that she had been planning for many years, the journey that she had so eagerly awaited. As the service was taking place in India, we, my family in our home in England, got up and knelt down in our prayer corner to commit my Ma's soul and sing some Bengali hymns that she had been singing. The burial was over within 24 hours of her death.

"My mother taught me that love is a circle which is created when human beings demand, give, receive and return love. Little children naturally create this circle of love."

As was planned my husband and I went to India for Christmas. It was less than two months after Ma's death. As we walked around in the largely Hindu neighbourhood where she lived, Hindu men and women stopped us to talk about Ma. One Hindu woman said "Your Ma loved us and she demanded our love. When she was well she used to visit our homes. The last few years she had been losing her strength, so she demanded that we visit her.

If she had not seen us for a few days, she would say, "Why don't you come to see me anymore?" When anyone in the neighbourhood was ill your mother used to pray to Jesus. She expressed her love for us in this way." Another Hindu woman spoke during a prayer meeting given in my mother's honour. She said, "Your Ma did not differentiate between Hindus and Christians and loved us all equally. She joined in our Hindu festivals and we joined her in your Christian festivals. Through her love we got to know Christianity."

We always knew that Ma took equal care of her body, mind and soul, but her dying process showed me the full extent of the strength of her spirituality. She was deeply connected with the ground of being, God, and her own inner being. The result was outpouring love for all. Ma had a very strong Christian faith and that enabled her to love all people irrespective of religion. This has also taught me that if your faith is deep, if you are a person of deep spirituality, you do not see people of different religions as a threat. Your heart becomes wider and wider to love all people.

Ma could say this prayer of Rabindranath Tagore wholeheartedly:

Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not. Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own. Thou hast brought the distant near and made a friend of the stranger.

I am uneasy at heart when I have to leave my accustomed shelter; I forget that there abides the old in the new, and that there also thou abidest.

Through birth and death, in this world or in others, wherever thou leadest me it is thou, the same, the one companion of my endless life who ever linkest my heart with bonds of joy to the unfamiliar.

When one knows thee, then alien there is none, then no door is shut. Oh, grant me my prayer that I may never lose the bliss of the touch of the one in the play of the many.²

1 Rabindranath Tagore, cited in a card produced by Middx: The Grail.

2 Rabindranath Tagore, *Collected poems and plays* (London: Macmillan, 1936), p.30.



Options

Not, in those final weeks, able to speak,
or stab words from small letters on her board;
rather a sort of mime in her own time,
not that she would have wanted last days counted.

Faltering, like halting rhyme scheme in a poem
coming apart at the seams. Her world now framed
with things she could not do. So Thank you
she could still signal when friends turned to go.

Some days stayed over, memories as ceremonies;
those supper menus with French wines in sequence;
mornings with birds, their stark cries beyond words;
tides pouring ashore, salt seasoning an islands' air.

Her art now out of reach, to paint or sketch.
Friends might pause, ask Why? She could not reply.
Time enough, surely? She was usually early
but stayed on for the leavening of the evening

through a thrush-opera. He would wheel her where
their chorus rose to brim their patch of garden.
She could just twitch her hand as if to join
their last verse, sentried as the darkness entered.

Time enough? they'd repeat, saving the date
the doctor noted from the diagnosis.
She seemed content to stay, trusting the way
the care was given; remembering the strand, the island,

her faith aware. The Celtic cross still there.
They lifted her with care. He closed the door,
sat with her till her journey was secure.
She stayed a couple of days, then slipped away.

Part of the after-days, when pages, prayers
faltered in focus, moved beyond the curious.
Those evenings when music came as the long rain,
strange became normal; future life eternal.

Fortunate that regime restrained the pain.
Others who still believed might choose to leave
in their own way, on their own chosen day.
Options should spare. We lit a candle for her.

Martyn Halsall

Prayer for Peace

*Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth.
Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust.
Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace.
Let peace fill our heart, our world, our universe.*

Satish Kumar 1937–
Indian writer

'Prayer for Peace' (1981); adapted from the Upanishads; see Upanishads



Inter Faith Week 2025

9-16 November / www.interfaithweek.org



**Cooperate/Learn/Talk/Reflect/Appreciate/
Respect/Volunteer/Make Friends/Celebrate**

9-16 November / www.interfaithweek.org

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Top L to R: St Albans School IFW lesson; Barking & Dagenham Faith Forum & B&D Council IFW flag raising; London Buddhist Vihara IFW event.
Bottom L to R: North Kirklees Interfaith Roses for Peace; Brent Multi-Faith Forum Peace Walk and tree planting (photo Saqlain Choudry);
Midlands Inter Faith Conference 2024. (URIUK). Photos from bodies except where noted.

About the Week

Inter Faith Week 2025 in England, Northern Ireland and Wales

When?

Inter Faith Week 2025 will take place from Sunday 9th to Sunday 16th November.

Each year, Inter Faith Week begins on Remembrance Sunday, and runs until the following Sunday. It is hoped that the additional Sunday provides the opportunity for other weekend events to take place as well as those linked to Remembrance Sunday. Remembrance Sunday was chosen as a start day to encourage people to remember together the contributions of all faiths and none, and to consider how best to create a just, peaceful, and harmonious world.

Inter Faith Week also ends on Mitzvah Day, an annual day of faith-based social action: www.mitzvahday.org.uk

What?

Inter Faith Week:

- **Highlights** the good work done by local faith, inter faith and faith-based groups and organisations
- **Draws** new people into inter faith learning and cooperation
- **Enables** greater interaction between people of different backgrounds
- **Helps** develop integrated and neighbourly communities
- **Celebrates** diversity and commonality
- **Opens** new possibilities for partnership

Why?

Building good relationships and working partnerships between people of different faiths and beliefs is part of the year-round work of many people and organisations across the UK.

Having a special Week provides a focal point, helping to open inter faith activity up to a wider audience so that more and more people are made aware of the importance of this vital work and are able to participate in it.

The Three Aims Of The Week Are:

- Strengthening good inter faith relations at all levels
- Increasing awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the UK, in particular celebrating and building on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society
- Increasing understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs

How?

Anyone can take part in Inter Faith Week and hold Inter Faith Week events.

Who?

Inter Faith Week is for everyone. Some of the many kinds of organisations who have participated in previous Weeks include:

- faith communities and their places of worship
- community and voluntary groups
- inter faith bodies
- youth groups
- schools and SACREs
- institutions of further and higher education
- local authorities and other public agencies
- sports organisations
- museums
- businesses and workplaces
- TV and radio stations
- and many others

Where?

England, Wales, Northern Ireland

Until 2023, the Week in England was led by the **Inter Faith Network for the UK**, working with its **member bodies**. IFN worked in consultation with the **Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum** and the **Inter-faith Council for Wales / Cyngor Rhyngffydd Cymru** in relation to the Week in those nations. Following the closure of The Inter Faith Network for the UK in April 2024, a dedicated coalition of national inter-faith organisations now organises Inter Faith Week.

Scotland

Scottish Interfaith Week has been running with great success since 2004 and is led by **Interfaith Scotland**. Details about the Week this year can be found on the **Scottish Interfaith Week website**.

This year's festival will be held from Sunday 2nd November to Sunday, 9th November. It will celebrate 20 years of Scottish Interfaith Week!

Mitzvah Day

In previous years, Inter Faith Week has ended on **Mitzvah Day**, an annual day of faith-based social action. This year, Mitzvah Day will take place on 23rd November 2025. The theme will be '20 Years of Building Bridges'. If you are interested in participating, please contact laurie@mitzvahday.org.uk or register online. www.mitzvahday.org.uk/registration-information

Background

Inter Faith Week is an annual initiative held in November that aims to strengthen interfaith relations across the UK. It aims to raise awareness of the diverse contributions of faith communities and promote understanding among people of different religious and non-religious beliefs.

Since its launch in 2009, thousands of events have taken place during Inter Faith Week. These have included discussions, dialogues, community walks, cultural festivals, and various educational activities.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK originally initiated Inter Faith Week in 2009, following the 2008 Department for Communities and Local Government report, 'Face to Face and Side by Side – a Framework for Partnership in our Multi-Faith Society'. Following the closure of The Inter Faith Network for the UK in April 2024, a dedicated coalition of national inter-faith organisations now organises Inter Faith Week. This coalition includes NASACRE, United Religions Initiative UK, Faith and Belief Forum, Religions for Peace UK, the Council of Christians and Jews, Mitzvah Day, and the All Faiths Network. A few additional members have also joined, bringing valuable perspectives from local and regional interfaith bodies, youth groups, and expertise in communications.

Hundreds of activities are held each year to mark the Week, organised by a wide range of bodies. Local inter-faith organisations are central to Inter Faith Week, with many hosting week-long programmes. These diverse activities often include picnics, interfaith pilgrimages, social action events, dialogues, conferences, lectures, and sports matches. Inter Faith Week 2025 will take place from Sunday, 9 November to Sunday, 16 November. The Week always begins on Remembrance Sunday, continuing through to Mitzvah Day (the following Sunday).

These dates are chosen specifically: starting on Remembrance Sunday honours the contributions of people of all faiths and none. The concluding Sunday, 16 November, coincides with Mitzvah Day, the annual interfaith social action day. This year, Mitzvah Day will take place on Sunday, 23 November, celebrating its 20th year.

Language of Art

Corners of the Art Triangle: The Artist, the Artwork and the Viewer

I was intrigued by this topic, the language of art. So I started by asking; what is language? Definitions online suggest it is a system or means of communication, most frequently but not always, involving words. A system for the expression of thoughts, feelings, etc, using spoken sounds or conventional symbols.

So far so good. The question then becomes 'how - or what - does art communicate?' But now there is an even trickier question 'what is Art?' If you look at the contemporary art scene, it's easy to feel baffled. The traditional forms of painting, drawing and sculpture are almost overwhelmed by installation, video, conceptual, photographic, ceramic, and land art, before we even consider digital art. I have wrestled for years with how to define art for myself.

There is clearly a deep human urge to create. Early cave paintings dating back over 50,000 years still speak to us across millennia. But I made a discovery while researching this topic. It is the phrase 'making art' that is significant. Art is best understood not as a static object but as something made— a verb rather than a noun. To 'art'.

And 'to art' is to make something with the intention of sharing an idea, an experience, or a feeling — to produce a work that hopes to register emotionally with someone else. It's the expression of the artist's thoughts, intuitions, emotions, or questions, sent out into the world in the hope that someone, somewhere, might feel a spark in response.

This definition means that art is not really about the medium used. Nor is it a self-contained thing. It's one corner of a triangle – artist, artwork, and viewer. Just like a rainbow, which can only exist when sunlight, water droplets, and eyes meet in just the right way. Remove one element, and the whole thing disappears – the magic is gone.

So when we start to think of art as itself a kind of 'language' – an attempt by the artist to communicate, to connect – then the eclectic, sometimes chaotic world of contemporary art begins to make more sense.

"Just like a rainbow, which can only exist when sunlight, water droplets, and eyes meet in just the right way. Remove one element, and the whole thing disappears - the magic is gone."

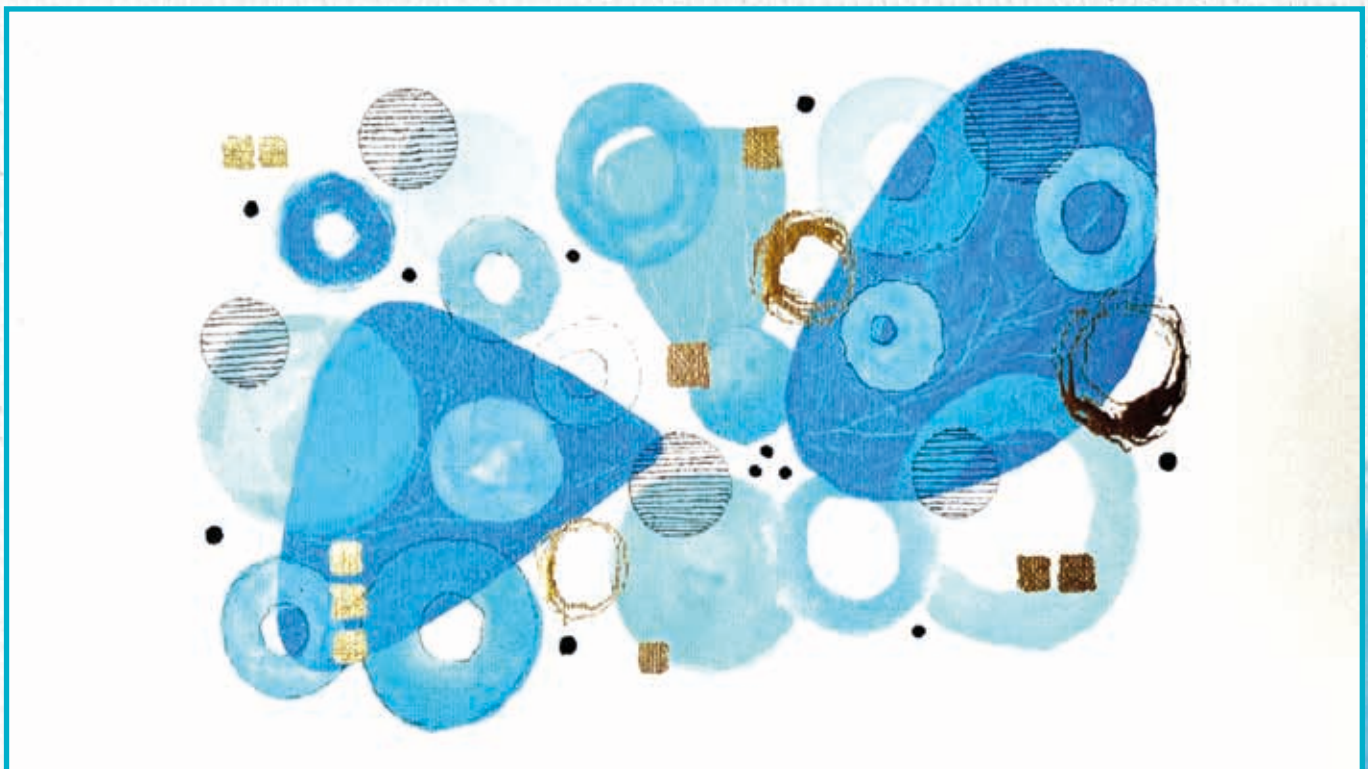
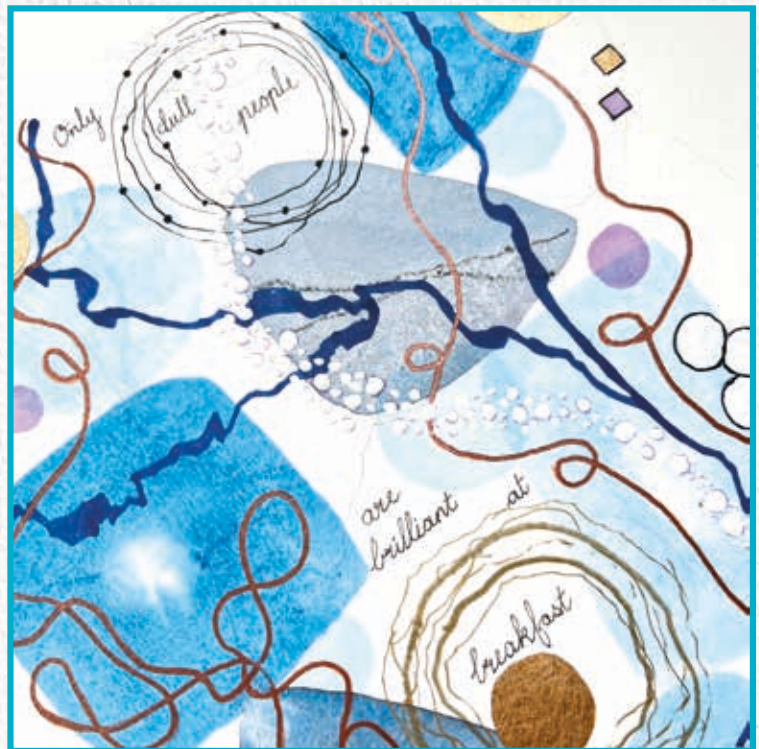
But just to throw in a random question – if art is indeed the “expression of the artist’s thoughts, intuitions, emotions, or questions, sent out into the world in the hope that someone, somewhere, might feel a spark in response” would you consider that Artificial Intelligence is capable of creating ‘Art’? Should we be revising our newly discovered definition? A topic for another day!

To bring this back to the personal, I have always had a very strong urge to create, and am happiest when working in my studio with paper, colours and a brush. But over time I’ve come to realise the equal importance of the third corner of the triangle – connection with others.

For a while I shared and sold on Instagram and Facebook, but their algorithms have recently changed their nature, for the worse. Now I primarily rely on my website to connect me with other people. I don’t put prices on my paintings, instead I ask for a donation to the local Children’s Hospice. I’m not keen to exhibit in galleries, online or otherwise because I’d honestly rather see the money go to charity than to commission fees.

But the third corner of the triangle doesn’t have to be transactional. Comments, conversations, responses – all work as connections to make creating art meaningful for me. And I’ve tried to make it easy for people to get in touch with me and send me their comments through the website.

‘Brilliant at Breakfast’



‘Singin’ the Blues’

So, to return to the original topic, what does my particular kind of art communicate? I have always been drawn to abstraction, but the very nature of abstract art makes it hard to put this into words. I believe that abstract art connects at a subliminal level, deeper than verbal language. It might stir a memory, a feeling, or a flicker of recognition in you — even if you can't quite explain why. Something from *my* inner world quietly resonating with *yours*.

That's why responses to abstract art are so personal. And that's the real question to ask when you look at non-representational paintings: *does this connect with me?* The person beside you might feel nothing at all — and that's perfectly fine. If it speaks to *you*, that's what matters. Art asks for a subjective response, and just like the artist, the viewer is a vital part of the triangle.

People often ask me 'where do you get your ideas from?'. The truth is, I don't. I rarely start with a concept — I start with brush, colour and paper and the paintings evolve, arrive, appear — really without conscious thought. This is particularly the case with the type of mixed media art I am doing now.

'*Singin' the Blues*', was one of the first paintings I produced in this particular style. I start with watercolour on paper, adding elements almost at random, stopping and looking to see what else is needed, and where. The process is slow and contemplative, and easy to overwork. You have to know when to stop. Step back and reflect is my constant mantra.

In direct contrast, another passion of mine is language. Words have always fascinated me - the way they mould and change and fit together, the elegance of well-chosen phrases. I have collected quotes for years, specifically, aphorisms - those brief, often witty phrases that contain a sliver of wisdom.

Consider for example Debbie Millman's '*Busy is a decision*', or Eleanor Roosevelt's '*Happiness is not a goal, it is a by-product*'. These aren't prescriptive slogans — they're gentle suggestions that there might be a different way to look at life.



'*Singin' the Blues*'

Finished, left

Unfinished, above

"I believe that abstract art connects at a subliminal level, deeper than verbal language"

"These aren't prescriptive slogans - they're gentle suggestions that there might be a different way to look at life."

'Eventide'
Full piece, right
Detail, below



Until recently, though, I had never thought of including quotes in my artwork. But one day, while working on a painting **'Dancing in the Rain'** that felt almost-but-not-quite finished, I kept asking myself what was missing. Shape? Colour? Texture? Then it occurred to me — maybe what it needed was words.

I hesitated. Would adding text ruin the subliminal power of the piece? Would it become too literal, too decorative? I didn't want to make a poster — I wanted the words to feel like a natural part of the painting, something to be discovered gradually, not announced from the start.

However, I did finally take the leap, holding my breath, and added this Vivian Greene quote, *"Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass, it's about learning to dance in the rain"*. And it seemed to work.

Since that first painting, I have been adding quotes to most of my paintings - even going back to revisit earlier ones. I try to use the text as part of the composition — a texture or shape that blends in, until, on closer inspection, its meaning slowly emerges. It's been a time of trial and error — it doesn't always work, and many paintings have had to be discarded.

Sometimes quotes are bolder and more visible, see **'Brilliant at Breakfast'**, with Oscar Wilde's quote *"Only dull people are brilliant at breakfast."* Others are hidden in plain sight — like the quiet reminder in **'Eventide'**, which says, *"We get to have this day."*

Buyers seem drawn to both the painting *and* the quote — not just the words. Holding that delicate balance is a challenge, but a joyful one. It feels as if all the different strands of my life are finally weaving together in these paintings-with-quotes that I am producing; I send them out into the world hoping that the triangle will complete.

Thresholds of Belonging, Identity and Land

...it takes enormous courage to stand along a conflict fault line and to invite those on all sides to listen.

St Ethelburga's was forged in the fires of sectarian conflict. Destroyed by an IRA bomb in 1993, the building was resurrected after the Good Friday Agreement to serve as a space for dialogue for those who might find themselves in similar conflicts in the future. Most geopolitical conflicts in history – and today – involve competing views about themes of identity, land, and belonging. Our iconic building stands as a warning about the dangers of sectarianism, and as a beacon of hope that such divisions can be overcome. Our work is to continue to uplift the vision of the peacemakers who founded St Ethelburga's, inviting people to step across divides in dialogue, for the sake of our shared future peace and security.

Over the years working here, I've learned that 'peace' is a message people both long for and one that they deeply, instinctively mistrust. Recently I attended a peace conference, where I heard peacemakers from around the world share a similar observation: that their work was often misconstrued, frequently by those in their own communities, as being 'for the other side,' or somehow legitimising the enemy's position. These peacemakers were working at the frontline of entrenched, frozen, sometimes active conflicts. Their extraordinary testimony reminded me that it takes enormous courage to stand along a conflict fault line and to invite those on all sides to listen. The call of the peacemaker can often sound at best naive, and at worst, subversive or disingenuous. But with conflict increasing on the world stage, we need more peacemakers to step into that subversive position, to invite people to listen across divides (rather than to simply condemn), for the sake of forging pragmatic solutions together.



St Ethelburga's
Centre for Reconciliation and Peace

As conflict heats up over the perennial themes of belonging, identity and land, there is an urgent need to listen deeply at the threshold of each one of these themes. We hear a great deal about questions of belonging and identity – and rightly so, these are of crucial importance to people everywhere. And, at the same time there is a need to uplift the third part of that equation – to consider the land itself. And even as we listen to the vital human story that concerns the interweaving of cultures, histories, and lands, perhaps we can also find a moment to extend a generous, listening ear towards the land itself. To hear the land speak in its own voice.

As our world grows louder with conflict, many of us feel a pull to do as Wendell Berry described in his famous poem, and ‘come into the peace of wild things.’

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

There's so much in this simple poem. It speaks to the very human desire to run away from the complexities of the world, to escape grief, fear, and anguish. But it also points to the deep mystery of our bond with creation. As Berry describes his inner state moving from panic, through presence, and into grace and freedom – this poem reminds us how nature's majesty calls to what's highest in our own inner selves. It's as though Creation gently holds for us the purest qualities of our own souls, ready to reflect them back to us when we are most in need of the reminder.

*...nature's majesty calls to what's
highest in our own inner selves.*

How faith, peacemaking and deep ecology interweave is a core question in all of our work. I hope you'll join us to explore these themes on 27th October for Deep Ecology in Practice, with Eleanor O'Hanlon. Eleanor is an award-winning writer and conservationist whose work integrates insights from science and deep ecology. She's also an eloquent writer, someone who, like Wendell Berry, has devoted her life to listening deeply to the more-than-human world. Her writing has a shining eloquence that conveys the distinctive charisma of those places in the world that she has visited. This evening is a rare opportunity to see her in person.

Don't miss our newly launched workshop Depolarising Through Dialogue on 7 November, which offers practical tools for bridging divides and nurturing connection in polarised times. Participants will explore dialogue skills, conflict mapping, embodied exercises, and practices of belonging – leaving with tools to apply in families and friendships, faith communities, workplaces, and social groups.

Deepen your peacebuilding skills with our Facilitation Training on 6 November, and Conflict Coaching training on 24 November.

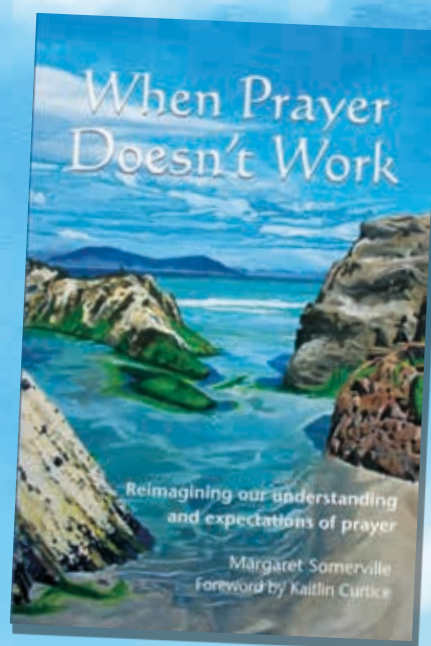
On 14 October, our monthly Contemplative Practice invites you into stillness as we celebrate St Ethelburga's Feast Day in the Bedouin Tent. During Interfaith Week on 11 November, join us for Honouring the Sacred, an open invitation to people of all faiths, traditions, spiritual expressions – and none – to come together in silence for contemplative practice, followed by a shared meal.

Listen to the World presents Germa Adan on 7 October, her Haitian roots infusing the evening with warmth and storytelling. On 2 December, Alkanna Greaca bring their bold vocal harmonies, blending raw folk traditions from the Balkans, Mediterranean, and Black Sea with free improvisation and expansive soundscapes.

The St Ethelburga's team

When Prayer Doesn't Work

by Margaret Somerville



A new book that asks what prayer really is, and finds answers in unexpected places.

In an age of spiritual fatigue and unmet expectations, Margaret Somerville's new book, *When Prayer Doesn't Work: Reimagining our understanding and expectations of prayer*, offers an honest and refreshing reframing of prayer, not as performance or formula, but as presence woven through daily life.

With a deeply personal and interfaith approach, Somerville explores how prayer can transcend words, formulas and traditions to become a grounding force of connection, presence and peace in our lives.

With wisdom rooted in her Celtic Christian heritage, Somerville draws on a lifetime of pilgrimage to the Isle of Iona and her engagement with Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Jewish traditions. Through stories as simple as her granny lighting the morning fire or the contemplative kneading of bread, she shows how holiness is present in the simplest gestures of everyday living. Her book is a call to embrace the holiness of every moment and the voices of all who cry out in pain, isolation and invisibility.

Readers are guided along six pathways – Sacred Space, Release, Naming, Wilderness, Nourishment and Peace – that invite us beyond disappointment and unanswered petitions into deeper communion with ourselves, one another and the divine. Together they act as an invitation to rethink, reframe and reimagine our understanding of prayer.

'A deeply moving, paradigm-shifting guide for our times.' – Arun Wakhlu, Executive Director, Foundation for Peace and Compassionate Leadership

This isn't a book of quick fixes or formulas. Instead, it offers a way of seeing prayer as nourishment rather than disappointment, as a practice that embraces silence, struggle and surprise. Both memoir and spiritual guide, the book speaks to seekers who are weary of rigid traditions, or a perceived silence from heaven, and to anyone who longs for prayer that feels real, rooted and renewing.

'At last – an honest book about prayer.' – Belden Lane, author of *The Great Conversation: Nature and the Care of the Soul*

'An essential companion on the journey created by allowing the holy to rise from the ordinary.' – Heidi Barr, author of *Collisions of Earth and Sky*

About the Author: Margaret Somerville is an educator, interfaith minister, and founder of Interfaith Alignment. She has been a pilgrim to Iona for over five decades.

Availability: *When Prayer Doesn't Work* is available from late September through Wild Goose Publications (www.ionabooks.com) and major book retailers.

About Wild Goose Publications: Wild Goose Publications is the publishing house of the Iona Community, rooted in the Celtic Christian tradition of St Columba.

Media Contact For media enquiries, author interviews or review copies, please contact:
Gail Ullrich, Wild Goose Publications gail@ionabooks.com +44 (0)141 429 7281 (to leave message)

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Editorial Note from Heather Wells

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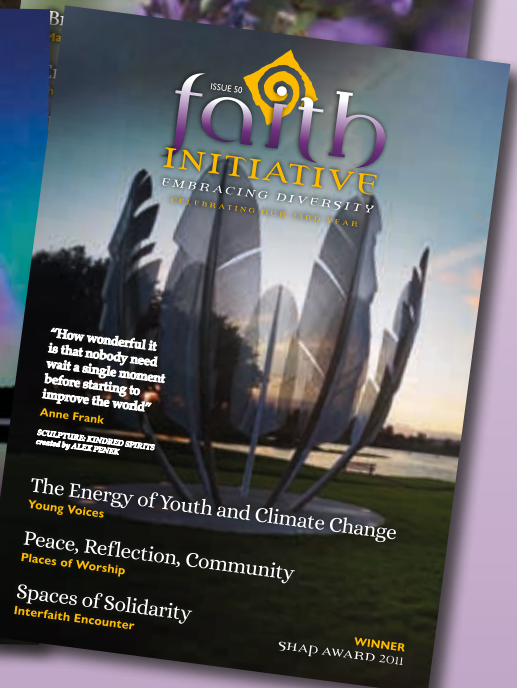
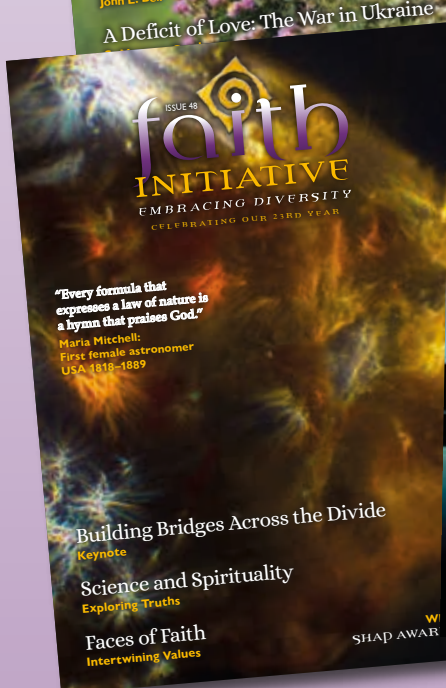
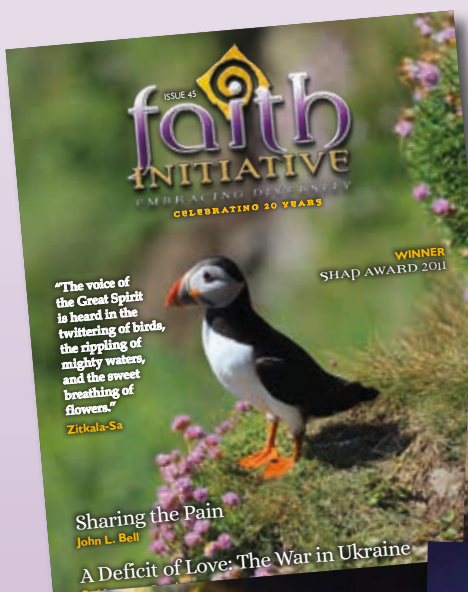
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EMBRACING DIVERSITY



Please contact the Editor for further information on themes covered in previous issues – see details over the page.

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Saint Kabir's Spring Hymn

One Universal Creator God. By The Grace Of The True Guru:

The earth is in bloom, and the sky is in bloom.

Each and every heart has blossomed forth, and the soul is illumined.

My Sovereign Lord King blossoms forth in countless ways.

Wherever I look, I see Him there pervading.

The four Vedas blossom forth in duality.

The Simritees blossom forth, along with the Koran and the Bible.

Shiva blossoms forth in Yoga and meditation.

For Kabir's Master all are equal.

Kabir ko suaamee sabh samaan || 3 || 1 ||

Guru Granth Sahib Page 1193



A Global Celebration of Light, Resilience, and Human Connection

Diwali, also known as Deepavali, is one of the most widely celebrated Hindu festivals in the world. It transcends religious, cultural, and geographical boundaries. Known as the Festival of Lights, Diwali is a radiant reminder of the eternal triumph of good over evil, light over darkness, and knowledge over ignorance. It is a celebration that illuminates homes hearts, weaving together ancient traditions, joyous festivities, and timeless values that remain profoundly relevant in our modern world.



Diwali Ankut celebrations at Gujarat Hindu Society, Preston



Fireworks display

The Significance of Diwali: Light Over Darkness

Diwali is the practical and symbolic celebration of moving from darkness (ignorance/evil) to light (knowledge/goodness). Lighting lamps represents this journey. “**Tamasoma Jyotirgamaya**” is a profound Sanskrit phrase that comes from the **Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad**, one of the oldest and most significant Upanishads in Hindu philosophy.

The word 'Diwali' is derived from the Sanskrit word *Deepavali*, meaning "a row of lights." The lamps, or diwas. The lamps flicker across homes, streets, and temples during Diwali are not just beautiful

decorations; they are powerful symbols of inner light, knowledge, and the pursuit of righteousness.

For Hindus, Diwali marks the return of Lord Rama to his kingdom Ayodhya after 14 years of exile and his triumphant victory over the demon king Ravana.

A Story of Victory: The Return of Lord Rama

The story of Rama's return is one of the most cherished stories associated with Diwali. Rama, the prince of Ayodhya, was exiled to the forest for fourteen years due to royal family disputes. During his exile, the demon king Ravana abducted Rama's wife, Sita, leading to an epic battle. With the help of his loyal brother Lakshmana, the mighty Hanuman, and an army of devotees, Rama waged war against Ravana. The battle is not just about winning a war; it is a powerful story about overcoming our inner weaknesses like pride, greed, anger, and ignorance.

When Rama finally defeated Ravana and returned to Ayodhya, the whole kingdom celebrated with great joy. Thousands of lamps were lit to guide his way home and to signify the banishment of darkness. This age-old story continues to inspire millions, reminding us that righteousness and love will always outshine malevolence and despair.



5 Days of Festival Celebration

The **5 days of Diwali** are celebrated with great enthusiasm across India and other parts of the world. Each day has its own significance, rituals, and traditions.

Day 1: Dhanteras (Dhantrayodashi)

Marks the beginning of the Diwali festival. It's considered an auspicious day for buying gold, silver, and utensils.

Lord Dhanvantari (god of medicine) is worshipped.

People clean their homes, decorate with rangoli, and light diyas.

Day 2: Naraka Chaturdashi (Choti Diwali or Kali Chaudas)

Celebrates the victory of Lord Krishna over the demon Narakasura.

People take early morning oil baths, light diyas in the evening, and burst a few firecrackers.

Day 3: Diwali (Deepavali)

Celebrates the return of Lord Rama to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana. Also the night of Goddess Lakshmi's blessings.

Homes are decorated with lights, candles, and diyas. People wear new clothes, perform Lakshmi Puja, exchange gifts, and enjoy sweets and fireworks.

Day 4: Govardhan Puja (Annakut)

Commemorates Lord Krishna lifting Govardhan Hill to protect villagers from heavy rains.

People create a symbolic Govardhan hill using cow dung and worship it. A large variety of food (Annakut) is offered to the deity.

Day 5: Bhai Dooj (Bhaiya Dooj)

Celebrates the bond between brothers and sisters.

Sisters perform aarti and apply tilak on their brothers' foreheads. In return, brothers give gifts and promise to protect them.

“The story of Diwali reminds us that perseverance, kindness, and the pursuit of truth can lead us to brighter days.”

A Festival of Diversity: Diwali Across Communities

Diwali is celebrated in many different ways across India and the wider world, each community adding its own beautiful colours to the tapestry of the festival.

In North India, homes are cleaned and adorned with vibrant rangoli designs and shimmering lights. The goddess Lakshmi, the deity of wealth and prosperity, is worshipped and fireworks illuminate the sky.

In South India, Diwali often marks the victory of Lord Krishna over the demon Narakasura. The day begins early with ritualistic oil baths, temple visits, and the bursting of firecrackers to symbolise the destruction of evil.

In Western India, especially in Gujarat, Diwali coincides with the end of the financial year, and new account books are opened on this auspicious day in the hope of a prosperous year ahead.

For Sikhs, Diwali is closely linked to Bandi Chhor Divas, when Guru Hargobind Ji freed 52 kings from imprisonment. Golden Temple in Amritsar is beautifully lit, and the occasion is marked by prayers, fireworks, and community service.

Jains celebrate Diwali as the day Lord Mahavira attained moksha, the final liberation of the soul. Jain temples glow with lamps, and followers reflect on the principles of truth and non-violence.

Diwali in the United Kingdom

For the British Indian community, Diwali is both a cherished link to their heritage and a vibrant celebration embraced by the multicultural fabric of the UK. Across cities like London, Leicester, Birmingham, and Manchester, Diwali is marked with dazzling street festivals, grand processions, music, dance, and spectacular fireworks.

Leicester, in particular, hosts one of the largest Diwali celebrations outside of India, where thousands gather on Belgrave Road, also known as the "Golden Mile," to witness the lights switch-on, enjoy cultural performances, and sample delicious Indian sweets and street food.

In British homes, families come together to clean, decorate, and light their homes, exchange gifts, wear new clothes, and prepare traditional delicacies such as laddoos, barfi, and samosas.

Diwali in the UK is more than just a tradition; it is a symbol of the enduring connection between generations, cultures, and communities. It reflects the spirit of harmony, inclusivity, and the celebration of diversity that the British Indian community proudly upholds.

Relevance Across Time and Borders

For Hindus, **spirituality** is a deeply personal and transformative journey toward self-realization and unity with the divine. It goes beyond rituals and beliefs. Central to this spiritual path is the concept of **Dharma**, which refers to righteous living, moral duty, and the ethical path that sustains cosmic and social order. Dharma guides individuals to act with integrity, compassion, and responsibility.

Complementing this is the ideal of **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**, meaning "the world is one family," which reflects the inclusive and universal outlook of Hindu philosophy. It teaches that all beings are interconnected and should be treated with respect, love, and empathy, transcending boundaries of caste, creed, and nationality. Together, these principles shape community cohesion and universal peace.

As we face modern challenges, be it social division, environmental crises, or personal struggles, The story of Diwali reminds us that perseverance,

kindness, and the pursuit of truth can lead us to brighter days.

Diwali also holds a call to mindful living. Traditionally, the festival is a time to clear out the old, let go of grudges, and make room for new blessings. This resonates strongly in today's world, urging us to simplify, to reconnect with family and community, and to foster inner peace amidst life's noise.

Though deeply rooted in ancient traditions, Diwali continues to evolve and remain meaningful for people of all generations and backgrounds. It is not just an Indian festival—it has become a global celebration of light, resilience, and human connection.

In celebrating Diwali, whether in the bustling streets of Mumbai, the quiet temples of Chennai, or the multicultural neighbourhoods of London, we honour a legacy of courage and compassion. A legacy that will continue to shine across generations.



Hindu forum of Britain celebrating Diwali at Houses of Commons...



...with dance performances

Turning Inwards

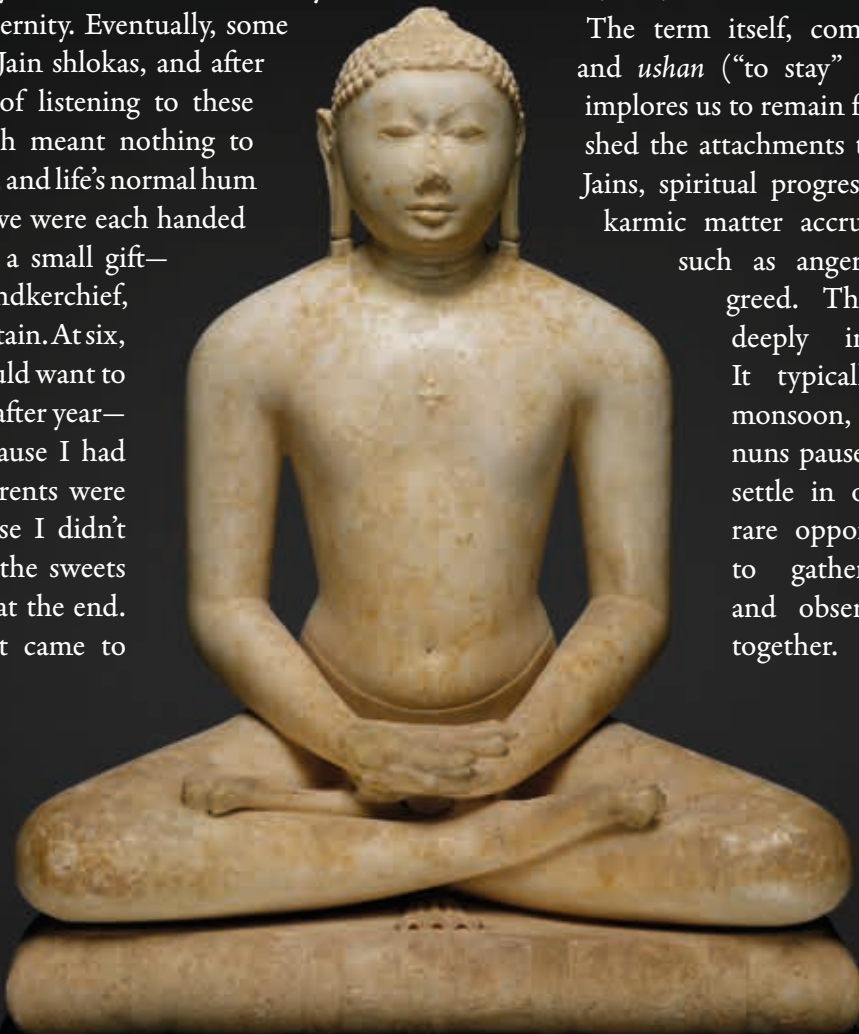
My first experience of Paryushan was when I was about six years old, and my parents took me to our Jain community centre in Mombasa. It must have been a warm, humid evening. Familiar faces greeted each other briefly before everyone sat down cross-legged in neat lines in a community hall which had ceiling fans (no air-conditioning in those days!). My mum joined the ladies' side of the hall, and my dad took me to the mens'. I sat beside him, curious about what was about to happen. Then, suddenly, the lights went out. Complete darkness. A pin-drop silence enveloped the hall.

I whispered, "What do I do?" He said softly, "Just sit quietly with your eyes closed." So I did—thirty minutes felt like an eternity. Eventually, some voices began reciting Jain shlokas, and after another long period of listening to these rhythmic shlokas which meant nothing to me, people slowly rose, and life's normal hum returned. As we left, we were each handed something sweet and a small gift—perhaps a white handkerchief, though I cannot be certain. At six, I wasn't sure why I would want to return, but I did, year after year—largely, I confess, because I had little choice as my parents were going and also because I didn't want to miss out on the sweets and the little present at the end. That was how I first came to

know Paryushan—not in theory, but through ritual, sensory experience, and community.

Paryushan is one of Jainism's most spiritually charged festivals, observed by both Śvētāmbara and Digambara communities as a profound time for inner purification and collective renewal. While both sects share the same spiritual ideals, they differ in certain practices and interpretations. Śvētāmbara monks and nuns traditionally wear simple white robes, while Digambara ascetics go unclothed to symbolise complete renunciation of possessions. Their scriptural canons also differ slightly, and so do aspects of ritual practice, which is reflected in the way Paryushan is observed.

The term itself, combining *pari* ("fully") and *ushan* ("to stay" or "come together"), implores us to remain fully with our souls, to shed the attachments that cloud clarity. For Jains, spiritual progress hinges on reducing karmic matter accrued through passions such as anger, pride, deceit, and greed. The festival is rooted deeply in this philosophy. It typically falls during the monsoon, when monks and nuns pause their wandering and settle in one place—creating a rare opportunity for laypeople to gather, study, meditate, and observe austere practices together.



The heart of Paryushan lies in *tapas*—spiritual austerity. One of the most distinctive practices is fasting. Many Jains undertake fasts that range from single days to the entire eight or ten days, depending on tradition. The strictest fasts involve only boiled water by day, or water alone—acts that are far from mere physical challenge. Fasting serves as a tool of detachment, meant to diminish desire’s grip, sharpen focus, and burn away karmas. It is a conscious renunciation of bodily impulses to strengthen spiritual clarity. Even partial fasts, where one reduces the number or variety of foods taken, are seen as powerful steps in training the mind and reducing attachments.

The daily rhythm of Paryushan for many families is marked by visits to the temple or community hall, the recitation of scriptures, and engagement in *pratikraman*—a structured reflection on one’s conduct, identifying where harm may have been caused, and resolving to act more mindfully. Children learn the principles almost by osmosis: the importance of truthfulness, non-violence, humility, and forgiveness, reinforced by stories from Jain texts and the visible example of elders in the community.

For Śvētāmbara Jains, the highlight is the *Kalpa Sūtra* readings, which narrate the lives of the Tirthaṅkaras—spiritual teachers who have attained liberation—most prominently Lord Mahavira. For Digambara Jains, the focus during *Das Lakshana Parva* is on the ten cardinal virtues, each day devoted to contemplating a different one, from forgiveness (*kṣamā*) to celibacy (*brahmacharya*) to non-attachment (*aparigraha*). These contemplations are not meant to be abstract but are intended to influence how one lives day to day.

Central to both traditions is the act of seeking and granting forgiveness. On the final day, Jains utter *Micchāmi Dukkaḍam*: “If I have caused harm to you, knowingly or unknowingly, in thought, word, or deed, I seek your forgiveness.” It is an act of humility and moral courage—an open acknowledgement of human imperfection and a genuine step towards reconciliation. Forgiveness is extended not only to family, friends, and acquaintances, but also inwardly, forgiving oneself for shortcomings, and outwardly, in principle, to all living beings.

Although uniquely Jain in form, the impulse behind Paryushan resonates across faiths and cultures. In Christianity, Lent is a forty-day period of fasting, prayer, and penance before Easter. Judaism’s Yom Kippur is a solemn day of fasting and atonement, seeking forgiveness from God and from those one has wronged. Ramadan in Islam is a month of daily fasting, prayer, and acts of charity, cultivating self-restraint and spiritual awareness. Buddhism’s Vassa, the rains retreat, keeps monks in one place for intensive meditation and study, often with laypeople deepening their practice alongside them. These observances differ in ritual detail but share a remarkable common ground: each is a structured pause in the year to focus on ethical conduct, self-discipline, compassion, and renewal.

For many Jains living outside India, Paryushan has also taken on the role of reinforcing cultural identity. In places like East Africa, the UK, and North America, it is often one of the few times in the year when the entire community comes together daily. The sound of collective chanting, the sight of elders in traditional attire, and the shared meals or fasts create an atmosphere that is both solemn and celebratory. For children, it can be the seed from which a lifetime of values grows—much as my own early, sweet-seeking attendance eventually blossomed into a genuine appreciation for the stillness and purpose of those days.

In a world racing towards distraction, Paryushan serves as a spiritual checkpoint. It calls us to loosen the grip of ego and desire, nurture compassion, truth, and non-violence, and take a step closer to liberation. The quiet courage of letting go, of sitting still in a darkened hall or fasting when surrounded by abundance, becomes for those days more potent than any outward show of achievement.

So, as the Jain community once again looks forward to the sacred days of Paryushan, I would like to take this moment—on behalf of the Institute of Jainology and from my heart—to say to every reader of this beautiful magazine: *Micchāmi Dukkaḍam*. If I have, in thought, word, or deed, caused you harm, knowingly or unknowingly, I sincerely seek your forgiveness.

TRANSFORMING JOY

...“YOU WILL REJOICE AND NO ONE WILL TAKE AWAY YOUR JOY”

John 16:22

EASTER JOY

IF ONE WAS TO ENCAPSULATE the impact of Easter in one word, it could be argued that ‘joy’ would be an excellent choice.

For Christians, Easter comes at the end of the 40-day period of Lent remembering Jesus’s testing in the desert. Christians often take time in fasting, prayer and self-examination. The last week of Lent is Holy Week, remember the final week leading up to Jesus’s death on Good Friday. This season takes us to the depths and to the heights. The depth of abandonment on the Cross when Jesus cried out “*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?*” words which echo round so many hearts and wounds to this day. But then on Easter three days later, the heights... Christians believe that God’s Spirit brought Jesus back from the dead as a real and living person, who we can know for real today. Easter is the ‘Feast of Feasts’. A day of great joy!

Joy is a key theme which runs throughout the written accounts of Jesus’ life. At his birth announcement to shepherds, the angels sing of ‘good news of great joy.’ At the start of his ministry, he announces that he is the fulfillment of God’s promises bringing: good news to the poor; freedom for prisoners; recovery of sight for the blind; to set the oppressed free and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.

Jesus’ stories of a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son richly underline the key point that God rejoices when he finds what has been lost. The final book of the New Testament describes heaven as a place of joy where all tears will be wiped away.

People who encountered Jesus found joy in many different ways: fishermen and tax collectors found fulfillment in following him; lepers were healed and reintegrated into society; children were welcomed and embraced; those crippled with guilt found forgiveness and many found freedom from the things that bound them.

Even in his dying moments on the cross, Jesus’ impact was felt by some surprising people. A centurion, part of the crucifixion party, praised God and acknowledged that Jesus was a righteous man; a dying thief asked to be remembered and received the assurance that he would be welcomed into paradise.

“JOY IS A KEY THEME WHICH RUNS THROUGHOUT
THE WRITTEN ACCOUNTS OF JESUS’ LIFE”

LASTING JOY

JESUS PROMISED HIS FOLLOWERS THAT they will rejoice and this joy will be something that could never be taken away.

The first people to experience the joy of Jesus' resurrection were a group of women who had gone to the tomb to anoint his body with spices. At the mouth of the tomb, they encountered two men in clothes that gleamed like lightening and they heard the amazing words that Jesus had risen.

It is remarkable to reflect on how the news of Jesus' birth and resurrection were shared. In both incidences, it was brought by angels and entrusted to people who, at the time, were not the wealthy or viewed as influential. The joy of the shepherds and the women must have known no bounds as they ran to tell others.

In the next few days and weeks, Jesus appeared to many of his followers. The joy of his resurrection transformed their lives and the lives of others as the message spread out from Jerusalem. The impact was not only felt by individuals but communities were transformed as the early Christians met together, sharing their possessions, so that no one was in need.

SHARED JOY

FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY, THE JOY of the shepherds and the women continues to be shared. On Easter Sunday, the words, 'He is Risen; He is Risen Indeed' can be heard resounding through churches across the world.

Through songs, readings, prayers, talks and craft activities, Christians rejoice that the death and resurrection of Jesus marked a turning point in history. Through this event, death was defeated and the hope of eternal life was made possible for anyone who believes.

A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

THE FINAL WORDS OF THE New Testament describe beautifully God's plan to create a new heaven and a new earth. The writer describes God's love for his people and how he is planning a heavenly dwelling-place which shines with the brilliance of a very precious jewel.

EASTER IMPACT ON DAILY LIFE

LIVING IN THE HOPE OF this new heaven and earth, Christians seek to live out the impact of the resurrection in their daily lives and through the life of their churches secure in the knowledge that Jesus promised joy that can never be taken away.

AFRICAN REUNION

Imagine it is October 2005 and, 75 years previously, three "members of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus ("SHCJs") had set foot for the first time on African soil, in Calabar, Nigeria. An anniversary worthy of a celebration! And a grand, wonderful celebration it was...

A description of our clothing will help to set the scene. The 100 or so African Sisters wore white dresses with short white veils; the novices wore grey and we visitors, English, Irish or American, donned white or pale coloured clothes for the rituals. We were all given stoles to drape over our shoulders with the fold in front. They had been made by some of our Sisters: gold for 50 years, silver for 25. Some jubilee!

Most of us had gathered in Lagos, then travelled to Calabar for a succession of unbelievably creative and inspiring rituals. The celebrations were punctuated by the dancing and drumming of pupils from the Holy Child school. On the first morning, in casual clothes, we drove through the town as a cavalcade, in lorries and cars festooned with balloons to the joyful sounds of music and drumming to put everyone into celebratory mood.

A high point of the celebration was the Jubilee Mass with all of us – the African Sisters and 21 visitors – renewing our religious vows. All of us "expatriates" had spent at least one year, some of us decades, living and working in Nigeria, Ghana, Chad, Cameroon or (a student community) in Kenya. Just one "expatriate" was still living in Africa; as I write this piece in 2025 she is back home in England after 45 years in Ghana or Nigeria. Some of the sisters enjoying the celebration were 70 or 80 years old, some had not met for very many years. I wish you could have witnessed the embraces, the rejoicings, the presents showered upon us by the African Sisters, past pupils, former colleagues and present students, grateful to their predecessors who had often been their educators in Christianity. Again and again,, those three days, we sang "Let folly praise..." and "Thou art the Light..." : old hymns beloved and sung since the 19th Century. In one ritual, one Holy Child Sister from each locality or region, wearing the traditional dress of that area

(not her own original area) was called on to stand up before the assembly and greet us in that local language. They looked wonderful!

Another time, each African community (small group) had been requested to bring some soil and water from where they were living then. In this glorious mud pie the Jubilee Tree was planted, representing the whole of the "African province".

Then there were talks. The first was given by our first African sister, now a respected theologian, who presented "Jubilee" in Christian Scripture: A time to free slaves, allow the land to rest, cancel debts. During those days, her book on The History of the SHCJ in Africa was launched. Another talk was given by two HOPSANS, Past Students of Holy Child Schools, on the subject of the challenges facing "The girl child" during their school days in the 21st century: how preference was given to their brothers, how they endured sexual advances from many of the men around them, even within their own families, how many endured forced marriages.

Out of doors, under welcome awnings, there was a grand banquet. More balloons. Lovely floral arrangements Blue and white ribbons. Cutting of the Jubilee Cake. Speeches, of course. There seemed to be no end to the creativity of our magnificent hosting Sisters. But this was not the end. On our last evening, the gracious Governor of Cross River State and his beautiful wife invited the 23 expatriate Sisters to another splendid banquet in their home. We were spoilt!

Throughout, we had been made so welcome, from the very arrival of my group (three Americans and myself) at Lagos Airport, where a smiling official enquired: "Catholic Sisters?" and waved us forward, ordering: "Let my wives through!" At the end of it all, exhausted but filled with joy and a warm community feeling, in twos or threes we eventually made our way home to our countries of origin. But "home" was also, and remains as ever, although we have grown old, our Society in Africa along with America and Europe.

Chidima! God is good!



1. The sisters are all dressed in the traditional costumes of where they were working
2. Calabar: Myself making friends with the amazing dancers and drummers from Holy Child School Uyo.

Freedom

Inspired by the song 'Aaj Phir Jeene Ki Tamanna Hai' from the Classic Indian film 'Guide' (1965)

For all members of the South Asian Women's Writing Group

Am I just a storm of dust and rain?
Someone tell me who I am.
I fear I may get lost on this new path
as I pull my silk saree away from thorns,
breaking the shackles that tie me down.
Unfastening my bracelets, my *payal*,
so I can move swiftly,
I run like the changing breeze,
never knowing where it will take me –
humming to myself, pleasing myself.

"Today, I have the desire to live, again.
Today, I intend to die, again."

Emerging from the darkness of yesterday,
I have no control over myself,
like a kite on a single strand.
Rubbing my eyes, I see
fields of wild flowers - I am free.
I feel I am rising,
this joy within me energizing.
My body is here but I'm somewhere else,
my life has gained and lost,
still I am smiling, laughing.

"Today, I intend to die, again.
But today, I have the desire to live, again."

By Kuli Kohli from 'A Wonder Woman' Offa's Press, 2021

Punjabi/Hindi translation:

Payal – Ankle Bells

Saree – Indian dress



This report offers an in-depth analysis of a body of work undertaken by the Interfaith Restorative Justice Project (IRJP) in response to the violent unrest that swept parts of the UK in the summer of 2024 following the tragic murder of three young girls in Southport. The product of a collaborative partnership between the **Faith and Belief Forum**, **Interfaith Glasgow** and **Why Me?**, the report explores the social and political aftermath, emphasising the role of misinformation in fuelling far-right protests and Islamophobic violence, which targeted Muslim and asylum-seeking communities.

Gathering data from communities in some of the cities most affected – such as Southport, and Rotherham – the report documents not only the violence and community trauma but also the diverse and courageous faith community and restorative responses. The research draws on media coverage, academic analysis and reports in the public domain and is supported by interviews, a survey, and community listening circles conducted by our project team. It finds that economic disenfranchisement, social division, and widespread misinformation were key drivers of the unrest, and that the unrest caused harm, anxiety and fear to communities and individuals, even those in areas not directly impacted. Yet, it also uncovered strong community resilience and a desire for deeper dialogue, healing, and understanding.

The title of this report refers to the ‘UK Summer Riots’ as a way of conveniently identifying the scope of this report: however, it is important to acknowledge that there were no riots in Scotland and Wales. As this report makes clear, the impact of the riots was felt well beyond the places in which they occurred. This report includes newly documented accounts of significant impacts that were felt by communities in Glasgow and Solihull – both cities where riots did not take place – and analysis of these accounts are woven throughout the later sections of this report.

The report underscores the unique potential of combining Interfaith and Restorative approaches to foster empathy, rebuild trust, and counteract hate. It highlights the community listening circles facilitated in Glasgow and Solihull, and the efforts of Imam Adam Kelwick in Liverpool, who initiated dialogue and understanding amidst hostility, as models of Restorative Practice. It concludes with recommendations and reflections aimed at faith communities, individuals and institutions, stressing the necessity of skilled listening, humanising the “other,” and confronting difficult truths within ourselves and our communities. This work is presented not only as a response to past violence but as a proactive framework for preventing future unrest and strengthening social cohesion.



Produced with the generous support of:



To read the full report, please visit

www.interfaithglasgow.org/interfaith-restorative-justice-report-on-2024-summer-riots/

How this report came about

Like many across the UK and the world, the Interfaith Restorative Justice Project (IRJP) partners were horrified about the unimaginable violence that killed three young girls - Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe, and Alice da Silva Aguiar - at a dance class in Southport on 29th July 2024. The violence, riots and unrest that followed also deeply affected us, mainly because we work day-to-day with some of those communities who were directly targeted and affected.¹

Coming together as a project team, we reflected on the violence and hate we were seeing unfold. Amidst the hostility and sensationalist news coverage, there was also emerging an alternative narrative missed by many in the media and the public. We were encouraged to see the support offered to affected communities and responses from some faith groups; most notably for us was the example of Imam Adam Kelwick² talking to far-right protesters outside the Abdullah Quilliam Mosque in Liverpool. Adam's courage really inspired and moved us. It also made us intensely curious. For a project team focusing on bringing together interfaith and restorative approaches, this one example provoked a lot of questions for us:

- What could we learn from this Liverpool example, and from other faith leaders who acted similarly?
- What had given them the confidence and courage to do this?
- How can what they did and learnt be communicated to other faith groups?
- Were they Restorative Justice (RJ) trained? Was this the beginning of a conscious restorative response? If not, would RJ training help support them further?
- What was the outcome of their interventions on the night of the marches/riots - did anything come from it? Were there follow-up meetings between the two groups; and, if not, what support might be needed to help bring about these follow-up meetings?
- What was the impact on those who spoke to the Imam? What was the impact on the Imam himself?
- How had the rest of the community reacted? Was there any reticence or pushback about engaging with those showing hate?
- How were other faith groups coming to support those affected in Interfaith solidarity?



Asking all these questions, we realised the courage and hope exemplified in this one instance demanded more research and further amplification. We also know that this is not the only example and that faith communities up and down the UK could share how they acted in the face of violent unrest – not just to present this much needed narrative of hope and courage, but also to help inform future crisis responses and inspire the types of new approaches initiated by work such as the IRJ Project.

Who we are

IRJP is a three-year National Lottery funded project by the Faith and Belief Forum, Interfaith Glasgow and Restorative Justice charity, Why me?. It explores how both Interfaith and Restorative approaches can address hostility, hate and prejudice against and between faith communities in Solihull and Glasgow. The project recruits, trains and supports faith community members to become Restorative practitioners within their own and other communities.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all those who contributed their time, expertise and experiences to this research. We are incredibly grateful that you were so generous around such a difficult, personal and often deeply painful subject matter.

We are also deeply thankful to the National Lottery for reaching out to us amid nationwide violence to ask how our communities were affected and if there were any other resources we needed to support those we worked with. Out of that offer of assistance has come not only this research and report, but also on-the-ground listening circles and many conversations that have proven healing and constructive for so many. We are very grateful to have such a compassionate, flexible and supportive funder for this important work.

Desk based research and writing conducted by: Laura Roper, Faith & Belief Forum.

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Many thanks to IRJP Advisory Group members Joanna Shapland and Benita Wishart for their valuable comments.

What happened...

In Solihull, a protest took place in the town centre on Sunday, August 4th. This was followed by rumours that far-right groups were planning another protest later that day outside a local mosque. In response, hundreds of people gathered outside the mosque to protect it, while police kept the two groups separated. Accounts from members of Solihull's Muslim community who were present that day offered conflicting views on those who came to defend the mosque. While some described them as well-intentioned and "community-minded", others noted that some individuals appeared to have different motives. It was also suspected that many of them had travelled from outside Solihull.

What were the responses?

Some members of the mosque expressed concern about the lack of engagement between the mosque and the wider community, and organised an event similar to the open evening in Liverpool, where local residents and members of the mosque could engage in dialogue. Organisers went door-to-door inviting the residents, and initially worried about how people might react. However, they encountered no hostility from local residents and, in the end, twenty people attended, along with representatives from the police, local churches and the council. One attendee became verbally abusive during the event, stating that he had only come to express his hatred. Although this individual originally refused to shake hands with the organiser, he did later shake their hand and share his phone number before leaving. However, despite efforts to reach out, the organiser has been unable to make further contact with him.

Following the unrest outside the mosque, an incident occurred at the Clumsy Swan pub in the neighbouring city of Birmingham, after rumours had circulated that members of the far-right were meeting there.

As a result, a group arrived at the pub to 'protect' the Muslim community, but instead ended up assaulting people inside and damaging the premises. The rumours of an EDL gathering were false, and the people affected were not affiliated with the far-right. In the aftermath, a group of Muslim activists visited the pub to apologise on behalf of the Muslim community. One of them extended his hand to a patron and said:

“To you, my friend, I know you were in the pub—it must have been horrifying. I’d like to apologise on our behalf. Here is my hand, here is my heart”

However, some Muslims expressed frustration over the expectation that they must apologise for the actions of others in their community. One person noted that no other ethnic or religious group is held to the same standard and that they were tired of always having to project a positive image to people who may still discriminate against them.



Solihull: Members of Solihull Faiths Forum at

Information on
IRJP's listening
circles in Solihull can
be found on page 21
of the report

Prompted by the unrest, in November 2024, Solihull Faiths Forum held their first ever interfaith walk, organised by Zahida Hussain from the Solihull Central Masjid & Community Centre. The walk brought together over 50 people into faith buildings, including a local Mosque (the Masjid), an Anglican Church, a Synagogue, and a Methodist Church. (pictured below).

In Birmingham, a local cohesion forum was also held in early 2025 by **Near Neighbours**, to hold open conversations about the riots and Islamophobia in the UK and in Birmingham specifically. The forum highlighted how factors such as education, class, language, colour of skin, nationality, sexuality, gender, disability, and religion, amongst others, can contribute to discrimination and impact social cohesion. It also emphasised how the erosion of civil liberties can make individuals more vulnerable to exploitation and more susceptible to manipulation by removing their support systems. These conversations will be used by Near Neighbours to develop a cohesion plan.

Solihull



their first ever interfaith walk in November

The Wild Swan

I have always been fascinated by birds and their symbolism. The wonderful variety in size, texture and colour is an inspiration and, as a textile artist, I am drawn to study them and try to replicate them in stitch.

I was presented with the opportunity to show work with Textile21 at Chester Cathedral in 2022, responding to the Cathedral's annual theme of "journeys." Textile21's body of work, "*Odyssey*", prompted me to investigate the notion of migration and I was immediately drawn to a stunning image of a beautiful white swan with outstretched wings. The swan has various symbolic connections, signifying purity, love and transformation, and can move effortlessly between air, water and land. I devised the idea of producing "*The Wild Swan*" triptych which took the swan on a journey through space and time. I wanted to include literary references as well as spiritual aspects, and to carry the viewer alongside the swan. The pieces were completed during lockdown which gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in my creative process.

I employed various sewing techniques to create the triptych. Each bird was first drawn out on to fabric or paper, the former being painted then free machine stitched. I traced the drawn birds on to clear PVC and added layers of cellophane before stitching as before. This type of stitching is known as free machine embroidery or thread painting. A special machine foot allows the sewer to manoeuvre the needle in all sorts of shapes and directions.



“The Wild Swan.” 5ft x 5ft Mixed Media

W B Yeats wrote *“The Wild Swans at Coole”* in 1917. In it he describes the joy of seeing the magnificent white bird silhouetted against the dark still water, surrounded by reeds and wildlife. But beauty is fleeting: the next day the swan has disappeared, leaving a feeling of emptiness but the memory of beauty.

***“But now they drift on the still water,
Mysterious, beautiful;
Among what rushes will they build,
By what lake’s edge or pool
Delight men’s eyes when I awake some day
To find they have flown away?”***

The verse from the poem is stitched through layers of PVC and iridescent cellophane using a restricted colour palette. I wanted the swan to stand out as the focal point so I used acrylic paint to depict the detailed head and body with the wings fading out to the sides. A layering technique has been employed for the water, and I added bullrushes, frogs and butterflies to the scene.

“The Conference of the Birds.” 8ft x 5ft Mixed Media

In my imagination I envisage the swan flying through time and space into *“The Conference of the Birds,”* a 12th Century mythical poem by Persian poet Farid Ud-Din Attar. The poem is an allegorical interpretation of the Islamic doctrine of Sufism which is the search for the truth. A group of thirty birds, led by their leader the wise hoopoe, embark on a long and dangerous journey to find their King, the mythical Simorgh bird. They encounter a number of trials and challenges as they travel, but I have chosen to depict them at the very start of their journey as they listen to the wisdom of the hoopoe, each one turning towards him for guidance.

***“Join me,
and when at last we end our quest
Our King will greet you
As his honoured guest.”***

The Wild Swan is shown towards the front of the piece surrounded by black velvet fabric.

I selected a variety of birds taking shape, size and plumage into consideration in order to create an interesting mixture of visual elements. Each bird was meticulously researched and drawn out on to either calico or paper, then free machine stitched. Water birds swim through the blue iridescent river and numerous others perch in trees or fly through the stylised Persian clouds. The inclusion of both sun and moon imply the passage of time, and the hoopoe’s greeting “welcome” situated bottom-left brings the birds, and the viewer, into the composition.





“The Simorgh.” 5ft x 5ft Mixed Media

The Simorgh is a giant mythical bird which lives in the tree of life and is so enormous that it can carry an elephant in its mouth and claws. He has lived for so long that he possesses all the knowledge in the world, and every 1,700 years he rejuvenates (as does a phoenix.) Again, I researched Persian imagery and created my own Simorgh using elements from various sources. I depict him flying through the sky, his serpentine tail swirling behind him.

When the birds encounter the Simorgh they come to the realisation that the enlightenment they were seeking was actually to be found within themselves, not through an external source.

***“There in the Simorgh’s face they saw themselves,
the Simorgh of the World, the Simorgh,
Trust’s last flawless jewel.”***

The Wild Swan can be seen at the bottom-right of the image. Where will his future travels take him?

Nikki Parmenter is a mixed media / textile artist based in the North-West. She is inspired by history, storytelling, symbolism, literature, applied arts and the Natural World. She has taught for over forty years and provides workshops and talks for students and groups. She devises projects and articles for textile magazines.

Nikki employs a range of techniques in her work and there is a strong emphasis on drawing which takes the form of free motion embroidery. She prefers to work on a large scale and her pieces are predominantly narrative and brightly coloured.

Nikki is chair of Textile Connections and is a member of exhibiting group Textile21.

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