

30TH ANNIVERSARY OF ABERDEEN INTERFAITH GROUP

Collected by Ajahn Sujan

Varapunya Meditation Centre Aberdeen, Scotland.

INVITE ONLY

CELEBRATING COMMUNITY

SCOTTISH INTERFAITH WEEK LAUNCH
**& ABERDEEN INTERFAITH GROUP'S
30TH ANNIVERSARY**
Aberdeen Town House
Broad Street, Aberdeen

We will celebrate community with
food, music and conversation!

 More information
admin@interfaithscotland.org

 Visit our website
scottishinterfaithweek.org





**DATE**
13 November, 2023

**TIME**
5.30 PM - 7.30 PM

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SIFW SPEECH 2023

Established by Interfaith Scotland in 2004 (nearly 20 years ago!) Scottish Interfaith Week provides an opportunity for interfaith groups, faith communities, educational establishments, organisations and local communities across the country to celebrate Scotland's religious and cultural diversity by planning events that bring people together to promote dialogue, understanding and co-operation between Scotland's diverse religious communities and cultures.

Every year we have a theme for the week and this year the theme is 'Community'. Community is central to interfaith work across Scotland. There are at least 20 local interfaith groups from Shetland to the Scottish Borders, made up of people of all faiths and spiritual traditions or no particular religious affiliation, with the common goal to reach out to their neighbours of all faiths and beliefs, to get to know one another, form lasting friendships, extend a welcome to all including our New Scots such as refugees from across the world, to learn about each other's faiths, beliefs and cultures and to live out the common goal of all faiths to care for people and the planet through joint projects in the community and further afield.

Fostering loving communities of trust and respect builds resilience in the face of crises of which we have seen many in recent times. We witnessed the enormous amount of work that faith communities and local interfaith groups undertook during the pandemic, supporting people in practical ways such as food donations and through emotional and spiritual support, helping to combat loneliness and social isolation through online religious services, interfaith dialogue and meditation.

We also come together on issues that affect us all, for example during COP26 when leaders of many faith communities in Scotland met together in the centre of Glasgow to pray and share their scriptures on caring for the environment, and all the wonderful work that Aberdeen Interfaith Group and Interfaith Glasgow have done organising events welcoming refugees and asylum seekers.

When other parts of the world are in conflict, the ongoing work of interfaith dialogue supports people in our communities who may be living in fear of being stereotyped or even attacked for their religious affiliation. It recognises that we are all valuable human beings with our own stories and experiences, not homogeneous groups.

Scottish Interfaith Week is a great opportunity to experience the different types of interfaith meetings, events, projects and initiatives taking place across Scotland. For example,

yesterday's events have included a conference on children's spirituality in hospices, the launch of Dundee's Faith Covenant with Dundee City Council, an interfaith service in St Mary's Episcopal Church in Edinburgh, an interfaith lecture at St Andrews University, and the start of a daily online group praying for peace.

The Faith Covenant in Dundee deserves a special mention. Representatives from faith groups in Dundee have met with the City's political leaders to sign a 'Faith Covenant', the first local authority in Scotland to do so.

Councillor John Alexander, Leader of Dundee City Council said: "Faith organisations play a vital role in our city and whether citizens identify as a member of a particular faith or not, all of these groups and organisations provide support, programmes, cafes, foodbanks and social activities, without exclusion; the diversity of our faith organisations is a real source of strength. These groups have at their heart an ethos of kindness, of hope and generosity. In these fairly dark days, we all need a little more kindness, hope and generosity."

So please enjoy Scottish Interfaith Week both in person as well as the many events taking place online and we encourage you to continue to reach out to those in our communities whether they are lonely or isolated, feel unwelcome or are actively discriminated against. We can all be an individual and collective voice for change.

Frances Hume

National Development Officer

Interfaith Scotland

Flemington House

110 Flemington Street

Glasgow G21 4BF

Foundation years of Aberdeen Interfaith 1992-2001

- Kathryn Hendry

OM Shanti, a sacred greeting of peace to all our distinguished guests gathered here today. It's an honour to be here with you to celebrate 30 years of ABIFG, and standing here in the Town House reminds me of the day of the inception of Aberdeen Interfaith.

The journey began with a seminar, "A Dialogue of Inter-religious Understanding and Co-operation," celebrating the Centenary celebrations of the World Parliament of Religions in 1993. (I think it was September?) in Marcial College. I relocated from Edinburgh to Aberdeen around 1990, in Edinburgh, Interfaith Dialogue was well established, and I had been very active in that group from 1985. So naturally, one of the first things I looked for in the City was the Aberdeen Interfaith Group, but we didn't have one. Then, one evening at a UN gathering, I met an amazing lady, Agnes Walton, who understood the importance of interfaith dialogue and was eager to work together with me to see what was possible. Around that time, we were aware of the Centenary celebrations being planned globally and felt this was an excellent opportunity to initiate such a dialogue in Aberdeen, support for the project was received from Edinburgh Interfaith Group and Glasgow sharing of faiths to make the Dialogue a great success.

Dadi Janki, the administrative head of the Brahma Kumaris, was a key speaker at that seminar. Inspired and understanding that we wanted an Interfaith Group in Aberdeen, during her closing remarks, she invited those interested in further Interfaith Dialogue to meet at the back of the stage in Marcial College. That moment marked the genesis of Aberdeen Interfaith.

Reflecting on the past, this room holds echoes of the beautiful reception hosted by the city of Aberdeen on the day of Aberdeen Interfaith's birth – like giving a blessing to this new idea.

Formation of Aberdeen Interfaith

Our journey started with numerous small meetings, a group of around 5/6 people, where we got to know each other, appreciating the diverse faith journeys present. I would love to mention names but I don't remember everyone, as each person played an essential role in developing the Aberdeen Interfaith Group and forming our Interfaith committee. We would meet at the University Chaplaincy in Old Aberdeen, using the upstairs Hall for our monthly Interfaith event that would take on different formats. Initially, we would listen to a presentation from different faith communities to understand each other, and we had

celebrations, workshops, and much more. The core group would hold planning meetings in different homes to develop what to do next. Set our Aims clearly, produce an Interfaith Flyer (it was still too early for a website)

The Aims and Objectives of AIFG were set and still remain today:

- To contribute positively to world peace through mutual understanding among faith communities.

- To deepen dialogue and cooperation among Aberdeen's faith communities.

- To encourage learning about and awareness of others' beliefs and practices.

- To make a public statement: people of different faiths can talk and listen to each other.

- To explore shared values and respect the differences between faiths.

In my heart, I believe that on that September day in 1993, a beautiful seed of vision was planted. Thanks to all involved, that seed was strong and able to take root, it received care and attention, and today, we witness the results of the continued commitment in this gathering. I eagerly look forward to hearing the rest of the story. Aberdeen Interfaith is a testament to the power of unity, understanding, and shared values. I wish that this shared journey continues to inspire and foster peace in our hearts and in the world.

Thank you, and OM Shanti.

Discovery of Aberdeen Interfaith 2002-2012

- Nigel Dower.

Although I was a supporter of the Aberdeen Interfaith from the beginning – indeed I was at the founding meeting – I didn't really get involved in it until I joined the steering group shortly after the beginning of the middle decade (2003-2013), first as a committee member, then as treasurer. Looking back what strikes me is that in that period we moved from being a group that mainly organised talks and discussions to one that started doing a whole range of other things together – like an AIFG dance at Airyhall community centre! We also moved away from being an organisation that included dealing with inter-faith problems – which were handled by our then hard-working secretary Stewart Prockter – to focusing on building positive relations in community leaving the problems to other organisations like GREC – which I recall likening to the difference between peace-making and peace-building.

I particularly remember a big event organised by our dynamic and committed Chair Hassan Scott-Paul when a prominent Imam Sheik Ibrahim Mogra gave us a lecture – we went to St Mary's church for an elaborate and most enjoyable spread of middle-eastern food. We also I remember had an extremely lively discussion upstairs in the chaplaincy on different faiths' approaches to nature/the environment – at that time somewhat different! Another meeting I recall vividly was a meeting organised by Stuart Hannabus who at that time called himself a spiritual humanist, when AIFG met some humanists in the basement of some flats in town – a somewhat tense meeting made more dramatic by the fact that the lights went out – adding to the atmosphere considerably! I also recall organising a discussion on the nature of Inter Faith dialogue – for which I managed to produce a long set of readings – something that probably wasn't appreciated then and would not be tolerated in our short attention span culture nowadays!

In 2012 I organised the first of several Human Library events in which members of different faiths spoke to small groups about their faith in a dialogical setting a number of times during the day – one of the most vivid memories I have of that was when a young Muslim woman who had accompanied Mumtaz said to us afterwards that she had so enjoyed the day because for once she could completely relax in public. So poignant and so sad. Towards the end of the middle period Caroline Cormack took over as chair and under her gentle and encouraging guidance we produced our first simple logo and started having our events presented in a programme. Overall, an interesting ten years of evolution!

Innovation of Aberdeen Interfaith Group 2013-2023

- Ajahn Sujana

My journey began in summer 2011. The Late Dave Macfarlane, born and bred in Aberdeen, a member of Aberdeen Interfaith Group and probably the first Aberdonian to claim to be Buddhist-and humanist encouraged me to join Aberdeen Interfaith.

I have been privileged to be involved in events such as the Interfaith Forum with GREC, Human Library, walks, visiting religious places, book reading and cooking and serving for homeless people with the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy in Aberdeen.

We have attended Interfaith Days at Portlethen Academy, Nescol and Albyn School to encourage young people. I collected all the questions from the students there and compiled a book 'your questions, my answers on Buddhism'. 5000 books were printed in Taiwan and distributed widely. Recently, we published a book on 'Anxiety' and hot off the press -this one for our 30th celebration 'Interfaith Stories' for which you can give a donation at the door.

The Royal events

In 2012, on behalf of the Buddhist group in Aberdeen, we invited members of Aberdeen interfaith to celebrate Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee with a special guest speaker from Thailand.

10 years later in June 2022 in collaboration with Aberdeen Interfaith Group we celebrated the Queen's Platinum Jubilee at the Varapunya Meditation Centre with Paddington Cake as well as reflections on service and gratitude. children wrote on 'monarchy' from Buddhist perspectives. We also planted a Tree to honour the Queen. It was a timely celebration as three months later she passed away at Balmoral Castle.

I personally went to Balmoral Castle gate to lay flowers and perform a Buddhist ritual. Meanwhile, on behalf of the Aberdeen Interfaith Group we sent condolences to the King Charles III and then a congratulations card to Him on his coronation, both of which were acknowledged.

Interfaith Mindfulness Day

In May, Buddhists celebrate Vesak day to remember the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and his death. Since we celebrate this annually, I wished to celebrate it

differently by inviting members from other faiths and religions to share and practice mindfulness meditation.

Since 2017, we have continued this popular event both in person and online. This is a day program with a mindful walk in the woods, experiencing Buddhist practice of food offering and sharing lunch and finally reflections on the theme of Mental Health Week for that year.

Faces of Faith

Scottish Interfaith launched the 'Faces of Faith exhibition' in Edinburgh in November 2022. Aberdeen Interfaith Group are honoured to be part of this exhibition where three members from Brahma Kumaris, Buddhism and Hinduism feature. Now, the exhibition is at the Sir Duncan Rice Library, University of Aberdeen, where we are having a reception and reflection on Tuesday 21st of this month at 5pm to which you are most welcome.

You, Me, and Cup of Tea

Due to the number of asylum seekers growing in the city and shire, this year Constable Sarah Grant and our chairperson Patricia Findlay suggested that we should do something to make them feel welcome and provide possible support and a project 'You Me and cup of Tea' born. We had five official gatherings in June in various parts of the north-east Scotland in the city, the shire and in Moray. We also had an unofficial one at the Varapunya Meditation Centre. We are grateful to the teams of people who have organised these events so far. We are determined to continue our service and support wherever and whichever possible. You can help us by donating gloves, hats, and scarves.

I am certain that there are many stories about Aberdeen Interfaith Group and personal journey. We are all different but human and interconnected, we may have different paths but like all rivers meet in the ocean we all seek liberation.

May all beings be well and happy.

Aberdeen Interfaith – Community Questions

Responses from the 30th Anniversary Celebrations at The Town House, Aberdeen – 13th
November 2023

1) What role has interfaith played in your community? Can you share an example?

- a) Visiting other faiths churches, mosque, synagogues, temples etc. And meeting and sharing rituals, sharing values: Bishop of Pittsburgh (2018) After the Tree of Life Massacre brought together the faith community around the Jewish community. Adventist Church – 2014 Program for forgiveness and met Aberdeen Carl Wilkins.
- b) Empathy
- c) Growing awareness of interconnectedness. Dundee initiative recognizes faith
- d) Shared an Iftar meal organized by the local Turkish community during Ramadan
- e) Today in Ellon: you me + cup of tea, speakers (refugees) welcomed history and future plans. Shared goal of working together – refugees got a voice. Able to share. Bringing people together and meeting kindred spirits; conversation; creating curiosity and understanding; building bridges and breaking barriers; social cohesion and connecting;
- f) Just beginning – Covenant of understanding between Dundee Council and Faith Groups
- g) Learning, helping people in need. Giving access to other communities; accepting people; kindness
- h) YMCT, civic events e.g. Remembrance, Mela
- i) Unity, coming together. Shared values that different faiths hold. Resources – collaboration (you, me + cup of tea), outreach for communities (welcome package for people seeking asylum). English Café. Diversity strengthens our community. Efforts going beyond Aberdeen. Connections, learning from others' experiences.
- j) Provost – important for Aberdeen. National level – cohesion vital. Bahai – inclusion of community. Faces of faith, Scottish IFW *voices not heard before now heard*
- k) Dialogue – and extending of different viewpoints
- l) Bring the community together in Aberdeen - good direction and expansion. Welcome from different backgrounds. This important so that all are welcomed

2) What are the key factors that contribute to a sense of community?

- a) Awareness, respect and embracing diversity, sharing & caring, positivity & effective communication. Being there when all seems to fall apart

- b) Supporting each other; sharing activities – You, Me, Cup of tea
- c) Respect, inclusion, dance, listening, openness, laughter, prayer, kindness, food, mindfulness, tolerance, music, meditation
- d) Warmth, kindness; open-ness and love; sense of belonging; respect; opportunities; compassion; safety; tolerance; sharing; fun; peace
- e) Shared values and goals – Learn from other cultures and traditions. Don't be afraid to ask questions
- f) Opportunity to gather together under one roof. Children's activities. Dialogue, knowledge sharing and being there for each other. Sense of belonging to communities – extensions of the support system.
- g) Open doors day. Music and dance
- h) Learning what are the needs of communities. Feeling heard, and feeling others are curious. Trust, respect, and openness
- i) Hindu- charity, doing things together. Multi-faith actions. Give back to communities through action. Education
- j) Respect, all are valued. Openness and willingness to listen. Exchanging of experiences. Can break down barriers.
- k) Interfaith playing a role in it. Aberdeen multi diverse – we don't want anyone to feel isolated and excluded by everybody else. Multicultural – people from different cultures coming together.

3) What do you see as the main obstacles to community?

- a) Loss of community – reluctance to move & cost of travel in rural areas
- b) Fear, us and them division, communication, ignorance, self-centeredness
- c) Prejudices; preconceived idea; time; space; polarizing; inherited informed attitudes
- d) Different values and goals – Preconceptions or misconceptions. Stereotyping
- e) Stereotypes, social media, racism, bigotry, ignorance/misinformation
- f) Ignorance, lack of understanding, prejudice, isolation, fundamentalism, lockdown, lack of opportunity to understand, current social structures
- g) Funding to promote different initiatives
- h) Ignorance; Stereotyping; Fighting for power; Fear; Divisive narrative – social media
- i) Preconceptions. Lack of shared 'dance.' Misunderstanding. Lack of opportunities for dialogue

- j) Becoming friends. Not my agenda, but everyone's agenda. Important – making & finding friends

4) How can interfaith contribute more to the community and the sense of community?

- a) Can bring people together, especially at this time e.g. in Brussels, they have silent marches – no placards and standing in silence. E.g. Opona pona Hawaiian process of forgiveness. I love you (self). I love you – all others. I forgive you. I'm sorry. Thank you!
- b) Increase Awareness, Create volunteer opportunities across all ages. Introduce a monthly "Interfaith Day" in Aberdeen schools.
- c) Possibly concentrate on youth continue to bring people together – humanity needs unity, now as never before
- d) More interfaith events, focusing on similarities, seen working together, places of worship open to all.
- e) Keep talking; building peace; more events to gather people together
- f) Cooperating & proactively involving everyone, even small groups
- g) More awareness/communication; voluntary work within the community; dialogue, more learning about different faiths
- h) Just keep going, do more, reach out especially to young people, open mic nights to share views
- i) Max young people engaged; Intergenerational engagement
- j) Listening to one another, respect, praying together and understanding one another

Vote of Thanks

We want to say a huge thank you once again to the Lord Provost Office and Aberdeen City Council for funding our event this evening and providing us with the beautiful town house and wonderful catering. Thank you to the Lord Provost David Cameron for your presence and your inspirational words.

Thank you to Dr Maureen Sier and her team at Interfaith Scotland and Patricia Findlay and the members of the Aberdeen Interfaith Group for all their work on practical arrangements for this evening and for pulling the programme together so tirelessly over the last few months as well as the exhibition which you will see in the foyer. Thank you to Ananth Subramaniam our MC for this evening for holding things together so well.

Thank you to our speakers, Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland; and Kathryn Hendry, Nigel Dower, Ajahn Sujana who took us through the 30 years of Aberdeen Interfaith group. A big thank you to our performers who enriched our evening, Aarna Sharma and Sameeksha Janaswami who danced for us and our Iranian Daf Drummer Amir Tahghigh.

Thank you to the members of Aberdeen Interfaith Group who led the dialogue and spiritual reflection: Gary Dean, Fiona Beeley and Nisha Halai.

And thank you all very much for coming and making it out this evening from all over Scotland. We hope you continue to support us throughout Scottish Interfaith Week and beyond.

National Development Officer
Interfaith Scotland
Flemington House
110 Flemington Street
Glasgow G21 4BF

www.interfaithscotland.org







Aberdeen Interfaith Group Celebrates 25 years

Aberdeen Interfaith Group assisted in planning and hosting a special event to mark the launch of Scottish Interfaith Week in November 2018 which coincided with the 25th anniversary of the Aberdeen Interfaith Group. Lord Barney Crockett cut a special 25th Anniversary cake and gave a moving talk. It was exciting to hear him declare that interfaith work was his 'Golden Thread'.

“No one is born hating another person because of the colour of their skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to *love*.”

Nelson Mandela











The Queen's Platinum Jubilee Celebration
 Varapunya Meditation Centre, Aberdeen, AB15 8RB, Scotland
 (Scottish Charity Reg. No. SC043989)

A Certificate of Award

to

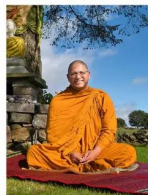
ASTRID BENDOMIR

For your long and faithful service to Interfaith work in Aberdeen.
With gratitude and appreciation.

Frances Hume
 Interfaith Scotland

Ven. S. M. Sujano
 Varapunya Meditation Centre

Date: 4th June 2022



FACES OF FAITH

An exhibition exploring
Scotland's diverse religious
and cultural communities



**In RGC Craig Centre for
Performing Arts Foyer**
Monday 20 March 16:25-17:30
Saturday 25 March 10.00-12.30





