



SOUTH EAST ENGLAND FAITHS FORUM CONFERENCE

FAITHS TOGETHER

MONDAY 7 APRIL 2008

UNIVERSITY OF SURREY, GUILDFORD

CONFERENCE REPORT

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Preface:

The 2008 South East England Faiths Forum (SEEFF) was hosted by the SEEFF Steering Group and held at the University of Surrey in Guildford on Monday 7 April. Although a register of actual attendees on the day was not kept, the number of delegates was very encouraging. It is reckoned approximately 140 visitors attended the Conference and 60 feedback forms were submitted at the end of the event. The SEEFF Steering Group consists of representatives from various faith groups including Christian and multi-faith.

The day was very full as the purpose of the Faiths Together Conference was to re-establish SEEFF as an important, integrated faith forum providing a voice for collaborated community cohesion and engagement at both a regional and wider level. The Conference was marketed to as wide a range of faith groups and representatives as possible and it is essential that the good work behind this awareness raising is now upheld in order to sustain the momentum, and energy behind, the SEEFF purpose.

The event was opened by Rt Revd Bishop Hill - Bishop of Guildford, and throughout the day, there were eight key speakers representing different backgrounds and faiths.

The aims and objectives of the 2008 SEEFF Conference were as follows:

- To provide a networking environment encouraging the opportunity to share good practice and experience, as well as to meet other faith representatives from around the South East
- For delegates to participate in one of five workshops in order to help establish the strategic pointers for the way forward
- To ascertain collective feedback on issues such as delivering strong and prosperous communities through interfaith action; how SEEFF can contribute to local and national policy development and, the bringing together and co-ordination of local interfaith networks
- To launch the new SE Faith Forum website – www.se-faithforum.net
- To relaunch the South East England Faith Forum and re-generate active interest and loyalty.

WORKSHOPS

The Conference consisted of five interactive workshops divided into three subjects:

Workshop 1: **How we can deliver strong and prosperous communities through interfaith action (*two workshops, one subject*)**

Workshop 2: **How a general Network like SEEFF can contribute to policy development (*one workshop, one subject*)**

Workshop 3: **How a regional body like SEEFF, can assist in the bringing together and co-ordinating of local interfaith networks (*two workshops, one subject*)**

The theme, title and objectives behind each workshop were developed by members of the SEEFF Steering Group and in particular, Kate Annison.

The Facilitators were specifically invited to lead a plenary session based on their knowledge and experience. Scribes, in liaison with their Facilitator, were asked to deliver a maximum of three issues at the end of each workshop and this was fed back to the delegates in the dedicated Feedback Session during the afternoon.

The key points from each Workshop are as follows:

Workshop 1 – Facilitator: Rani Bilkhu

Key issues:

- Mutual understanding through respect and education to promote a safer and stronger community

- What is needed to make inter-faith collaboration possible?
 - Building up effective communication between those willing to engage (resource, time, cultural awareness?) etc

- A Forum to facilitate links to other groups (resources/information and guidance e.g. grant applications)

Workshop 1 – Facilitator: Taki Jaffer

Key issues:

- Strategic planning/research to meet faith based community objectives for the common good with active participation in local networks/LSP/community boards
- Education – to allow for table fellowship, better understanding of the faith communities and breaking down stereotypes through inter-faith engagement with mutual respect
- Ownership – with grassroots participation, bottom up with common themes, active dialogue and accountability for delivery and trust at ALL levels

Workshop 2 – Facilitator: Kate Annison

Key issues:

- We need to recognise that working on inter-faith matters and working on public policy matters are two distinct areas - we need to improve the public policy area
- We need to create a clear mechanism for:
 - feeding up policy priorities from the local level
 - translating down from central and local government
- To be effective, we need professional policy engagement

Workshop 3 – Facilitator: Ian Chisnall

Key issues:

- Map local inter-faith groups and how to communicate with them
- Define what needs to be communicated and the best mechanisms e.g. website/newsletter/events
- Make use of existing regional bodies and work with them

Workshop 3 – Facilitator: Canon Nick Ralph

Key issues:

- Communication - regional means of communicating to local networks/groups
- Support/capacity building – support with issues of governance, structure, membership, resources, publications, information
- Education/Information – engage in dialogue with individuals/groups/ organisations of different faiths

Each delegate was given the choice of which Workshop they would like to attend both prior to the Conference and on the day.

Feedback suggests the Workshops were successful and attendees found them very interesting. However, comments suggest an extra half hour per plenary session would have been beneficial as in some instances one hour was not quite long enough.

CONFERENCE PRESENTERS – IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE:

John Scott

John joined the public sector in 1989, having been a company secretary in the electrical retailing trade, and was appointed Assistant Chief Officer for the Surrey Probation Service based at their Head Office in Godalming, Surrey. In November 1999 John was seconded to the Home Office to introduce the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act. The National Probation Service came into being on 1st April 2001 and he was appointed as the first Head of Performance, Planning and the Regions of the National Probation Service on this date.

April 2003 John was seconded to the No. 10 Strategy Unit as part of the team undertaking a review of the Correctional Services and in September 2004 was appointed Home Office Regional Director for the South East. At the beginning of January 2007 he became Deputy Regional Director for Safer and Stronger Communities - a role that carries responsibility for strategy, policy and delivery for crime, drugs and anti social behaviour. John also has regional responsibility for the Third Sector, culture, community empowerment and rural communities.

A degree in Social Sciences (Law, Economics and Politics) from Oxford Brookes University, John completed an MBA at Reading University in 2003.

Dr Harriet Crabtree

Harriet Crabtree is Director of the Inter Faith Network for the UK, an organisation for which she has worked since 1990.

The Network links faith community representative bodies, inter faith bodies, academic institutions and educational bodies concerned with inter faith issues in the UK. Harriet works with them to promote good inter faith relations. In a personal capacity, Harriet served as a member of the Commission for Integration and Cohesion during 2006-07.

John Devine

Monsignor John Devine is a Roman Catholic priest of the Archdiocese of Liverpool. He was appointed Churches' Officer for the North West in 2000 liaising between the mainstream Christian Churches and regional government bodies. He is concerned with the Churches involvement in economic development, regeneration, social inclusion, urban and rural affairs, the environment, culture and tourism.

Thirty years as a priest, John has worked in Skelmersdale New Town, the Peruvian Andes, and Huyton. Whilst serving for ten years as Director of St Joseph's College, Upholland, he held additional diocesan responsibility for clergy in-service training, missionary activity and Justice & Peace issues.

John speaks on behalf of the Anglican, Methodist, Roman Catholic, United Reformed Churches, the Baptist Union, Salvation Army and Society of Friends. Although employed by these churches he is committed to working alongside people of all faiths encouraging partnership working at neighbourhood, local and regional levels. With the support of the Northwest Regional Development Agency he published the report 'Faith in England's Northwest: The Contribution made by faith communities to civil society in the region' in November 2003. A follow-up Economic Impact Assessment on the role of faith communities in the region was published at an event in Manchester Town Hall in February 2005.

John was instrumental in setting up the Northwest Forum of Faiths which was inaugurated by the, then, Home Office minister Paul Goggins in Preston in January 2006. Since this time, he has been Chair of the Social Economic and Environmental Partners group on the North West Regional Assembly. He also serves on the board of Voluntary Sector North West; is a member of the Governing Council of Liverpool Hope University; the Committee for Other Faiths of the Catholic Bishops Conference of England & Wales, and is the Roman Catholic representative on the Communities and Local Government Faith Communities Consultative Council.

From 1st April 2008 John will assist the Northwest Regional Development Agency in taking the national lead role on faith issues, liaising on behalf of the nine English regions, and central government departments.

Guy Wilkinson

In July 2005 Canon Guy Wilkinson was appointed to serve as National Inter Faith Relations Adviser and Secretary for Inter Faith Relations to the Archbishop of Canterbury. This post combines responsibilities for the national Inter Faith work of the Church of England and support for the Archbishop's work in this area.

Canon Wilkinson has worked in Kenya, Uganda, Mauritius and Belgium; in the public sector as a European Civil servant; and as a Director of a large food manufacturing company, before ordination in 1987. Since then, he has served in parishes in Coventry, Guildford and Birmingham dioceses and, from 1999, as Archdeacon of Bradford. He was vicar of Small Heath, Birmingham, in a (majority) Muslim community and in Bradford worked with a variety of Faith communities across the city.

Canon Guy Wilkinson has been a Governor of maintained schools in Coventry, Birmingham and Bradford and is the lead person for the General Synod's Presence and Engagement process.

Dr. Abduljalil Sajid

Dr. Abduljalil Sajid is currently Chairman of the Muslim Council for Religious and Racial harmony UK; Chairman of the National Association of British Pakistanis and a member of the Central Working Committee of the Muslim Council of Britain. Dr Sajid is also the Chairman Taskforce for 2008 European year of Inter-cultural Dialogue. He has been a key note speaker for many national and International seminars and conferences and has been described by many as a peace-maker and bridge-builder British Imam. Dr Sajid was a key speaker at the South East Faith Forum's inaugural conference held in September 2001.

A member of the Imams and Mosques Council of UK, Dr Sajid is also Chairman of the UK Chapter of the World Conference of Religion and Peace; an International Secretary to the Executive Committee and a member of the World Congress of Faiths. He is a founding member of the Standing Conference of Jews, Christian and Muslims in Europe and is consultant to many statutory and voluntary agencies on race, multicultural and religious issues.

Dr Sajid's qualifications are several including the highest Islamic degree of Mufti from Jameul Uloom Uni Multan (Pakistan). He is a Master of Oriental Learning (Punjab University 1967), and an MSc in Muslim Philosophy & Thought from Dhaka University (1968). He studied at the London School of Economics and at Kent University (1974-1976) and received his PhD from the International Islamic University Islamabad (Pakistan) in 1988. He moved to the UK in 1972.

Dr Sajid is Muslim Chaplain at Brighton's two universities and also at the county hospitals. He was the founding Chair of the Brighton & Hove Interfaith Contact Group and is Secretary of the Ethnic Minorities Representatives Council in the City as well as imam of the Brighton Islamic Mission.

Nitin Mehta MBE

In 1975 Nitin Mehta founded the Bharatiya Sanskar Kendra (Indian Cultural Centre) duties, of which, include the organisation of youth clubs and liaison with the local authorities regarding Indian affairs. He taught Gujarati for 20 years and since 2003 has been involved with 'Night Watch' providing food to the homeless every night in Croydon. In 1978 Nitin founded the Young Indian Vegetarians and in 1991, the Jain Animal Sanctuary which is successfully responsible for the financing of an animal sanctuary in Burwash, Sussex.

A committee member on several groups and involved with several organisations including Croydon Guild of Voluntary Organisations (now Croydon Voluntary Action); Hindu Temple in South Norwood; the Croydon Police Consultative Committee (1990-1992), Nitin was Chairman of Croydon Economic Forum (now Croydon Partnership) for two years from 1995 and Governor of Croydon College; Board of directors for Compassion in World Farming, 2004, and in 2005 became a Patron for Quaker Concern for Animals.

Nitin Mehta has also received several awards which include a certificate of commendation for leading a group of young performers at the VE Day celebrations in Hyde Park (1995); an MBE in 1999; an award from Ken Livingstone (Mayor of London) for making a significant contribution to London (2002) and in 2006 was awarded a 'Sanskar Garima' award from Gujarat Samachar and Asian Voice publications, for services to the Gujarati language and Vegetarianism. He is a published author of several books and articles.

Alexander Goldberg

Alex Goldberg is the Community Issues Director of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, a chaplain at the University of Surrey and a human rights activist.

At the Board of Deputies he oversees the education department, the Jewish community's think-tank, the Community Policy Research Group, Shared Futures School linking project, regional development, cohesion and equality issues and the heritage department. Alex was called to the Bar in 2001 and was formerly Senior Policy Officer on Race Relations at the CRE. At the University of Surrey, he is part of the multi-chaplaincy team building an innovative Multifaith Centre.

He addressed the inaugural session of the UN Human Rights Commission in 2006 as the chair of the CCJO - René Cassin group, and is a national advisor to the Three Faiths Forum and the Centre for Research on Nationalism, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism. Alex is a broadcaster and writer on community issues, human rights and interfaith issues. He is a regular panellist on BBC 1's 'The Big Questions'.

Anna Cummins

Anna is Head of the Faith Communities Engagement Team within the Department for Communities and Local Government. The team has responsibility for working with faith communities to increase community cohesion and integration; increasing faith communities' contribution to active citizenship and community cohesion; building on their role as agents of change within communities and developing a national inter faith strategy.

Anna is a career civil servant who, over the past 20 years, has worked in a number of Government departments on portfolios ranging from biotechnology to welfare reform. Most of her experience has been gained through working on European policy. Anna also has direct experience of working in the third sector and is currently Chair of a local organisation providing the domestic violence service on behalf of the local authority. Anna sits as a lay magistrate in her local community.

FAITHS TOGETHER CONFERENCE - DELEGATE FEEDBACK

All the delegates attending the Faiths Together Conference, approximately 140, were asked to complete a feedback form and hand it in to the organisers on the day. In total 60 delegates 'posted' their completed feedback forms in the assigned Feedback box on the day. This section of the Conference report is the analysis of those 60 responses.

The feedback questionnaire was broken down into several sections and the results are outlined below:

THE CONFERENCE:

Q1. How useful did you find the overall event?

50% said they found it very useful, 48% said they found it quite useful.

Q2. What aspects of the Faiths Together Conference did you find the most useful? (*Delegates invited to tick up to four boxes*)

Key speaker presentations	-	65%
Presentations generally	-	52%
Workshops	-	40%
Networking opportunities	-	53%

Q3. How did the following apply to you? (*Delegates invited to tick up to three boxes*)

The Conference provided a forum for and open and honest debate	-	47%
The Conference helped extend previous understanding	-	63%
Addressed the future of the Interfaith environment	-	57%

THE WORKSHOPS:

Q4. Which workshops did you attend and how useful did you find it?

Workshop 1 - 33 attendees answered:

34% found it very useful, 45% said quite useful and 21% said not at all

Workshop 2 - 10 attendees answered:

30% found it very useful, 60% said quite useful and 10% said not at all

Workshop 3 – 12 attendees answered:

67% found it very useful, 25% found it quite useful and 8% said not at all

The majority of those who answered agreed the workshops were useful.

Q5. How useful was the Feedback session?

62% found the feedback session quite useful, 30% found it very useful and 8% did not find it useful at all. 13 delegates chose not to answer this question.

LUNCH:

Q6. How did delegates enjoy the buffet lunch?

The majority of attendees found the food very good and specific comments regarding catering will be fed back to the venue.

ADMINISTRATION & ORGANISATION:

Of those who visited it, 36% found the dedicated Conference website very informative and 52% said they found it fairly satisfying.

69% were very satisfied with their confirmation details leading up to the event and 25% were fairly satisfied.

Delegates were asked how useful they found the directions to the venue, 45% reported they found them very satisfactory and 43% said fairly. There was a problem with signage from the car park to the Conference reception and this was fed back to the venue on the day.

An overwhelming 68% of delegates reported that they had not visited the se-faithforum.net website which is disappointing. Of those who had, 4% found it very useful, 23% found it fairly useful and 2% said not at all.

The majority of attendees (80%) found the organisation team very helpful, 20% said they found them fairly helpful. Comments received included that they had not any interaction and they found it difficult to determine from badge colours who was on the Organisation team.

FINALLY:

Q10. Satisfaction with the general Conference administration:

Leading up to the event, 69% delegates reported they were very satisfied and 31% were fairly satisfied.

78% were very satisfied with the general administration during the Conference and 22% were fairly satisfied.

Q11. Will the Faiths Together Conference help establish the future of the South East Interfaith Forum?

Delegates were not conclusive in their opinions on this question and several had comments which are listed in appendix A. 57% said yes and 43% said possibly.

Question 12 asked if delegates thought they would attend future Conferences, 54% said yes, 46% said possibly.

Question 13 asked if delegates will visit the website for further information, 73% said yes they would and 22% said possibly. A small minority stated they did not have access to the internet.

FINANCIAL COSTS

The Faiths Together Conference was funded by sponsors who were all thanked during the closing address. There was also a dedicated graphic at the entrance to the reception area which was on display all day thanking each sponsor through text and use of their logo.

CONCLUSION

The Faiths Together Conference on 7 April 2008 was the first event since September 2005 and was produced in order to *relaunch* the South East England Faith Forum.

Feedback from delegates has been very positive and this is reflected in comments made by the attendees both on the day and in the written Feedback Questionnaires.

The key speakers were very well received as was the website although the majority of attendees were not aware, in advance of the Conference that a website was in existence. Delegates found the workshops useful and gave some constructive comments in their Feedback Questionnaires. For example extending the length of time allocated for each plenary session; some delegates found it difficult having two rooms discussing the same question and other comments questioned the brief feedback session as it was too superficial. In his closing comments, Canon Chris Rich promised the workshops would be written up in more detail by the scribes and published on the website. This is something that needs to be addressed and followed through - the scribes were all made aware of this prior to the Conference.

Several delegates stated the importance of the next stage and follow up to the Conference. The website is a key player in this communication and most people promised to visit the website now they are aware of its existence. However, it will be necessary to keep this as fresh and as updated as possible. Maybe the introduction an interactive facility such as a blog or chatroom could also be introduced to help sustain the networking opportunity.

Overall, the 2008 Faiths Together was a complete success and the Steering Group should congratulate themselves. There is now a limited window of opportunity for the Workshop outcomes and questionnaire feedback to be addressed in order for the South East England Faith Forum to be relaunched and the Conference objectives to be met.

Appendices



COMMENTS FROM DELEGATE FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRES:

- The Conference addressed all areas of interest to our Network (Interfaith)
- More time for the workshops would have been useful – they were too short
- Ideas and inspiration for the future
- Good opportunity for networking and understanding themes relating to interfaith
- Information received prior to the event – polite, warm, welcoming email – prompt
- Organisers were helpful, prompt and attentive
- Enough pre and post registration information and a very polite nudge to chose a workshop
- Enjoyable and worthwhile opportunity to learn from representatives of other faiths
- Organisation of tea & coffee could have been improved e.g. set up blocking entry to workshop room, long queue in the afternoon
- Emphasis on **need** to work together and understand each other instead of practicality of **how**
- Workshops too short for any useful result.
- Bland, idealistic waffle prevailed in workshop
- Bad signage to building
- Time was well spent
- Questions put to groups were vague
- Attended the 2005 Conference in London – this one will need follow-up. Too much Anglican control (*member of an Anglican church*)
- Good range of issues addressed
- Such a body is very much needed (*SE Interfaith Forum*)
- Speakers were generally rushed along – felt they needed more time to put their points across clearly and for listeners to assimilate information. Maybe fewer speakers with more time for each
- Didn't feel the workshop addressed the original question (*workshop 1 - more related to workshop 3's question!* Disappointing)
- Particularly interested in how SEEFF was going to act on the 'Beyond Belief' recommendations. Don't feel I have learnt that. Would be interested in hearing/reading what will happen on the website
- Beneficial – learning from other people's experiences and getting more local comments
- Future of SE Interfaith Forum – depends on how it is followed up and what actions are taken
- No explanation on who Jacinta Thorley and Anna Cummins were
- John Devine was an excellent speaker
- Could have been more publicity about this event
- Heard some people say they were not sure the day matched the 'advert'
- Very useful feedback on what role a regional organisation should play

- Brought large group of diverse individuals' together and raised awareness of SEEFF. Hopefully – regular SEEFF Conferences will sustain enthusiastic and diverse attendance and input
- Definitely more events please
- Beware use of jargon and assumptions that everyone has a similar understanding of terms
- Workshop felt rushed. We didn't have time to explore possible outcomes
- Considerable scope to develop website as an interactive tool
- Workshop too rushed and lecture theatre not an appropriate venue for a small group discussion
- Signage to the venue
- We need such events much more to meet people who have some sort of faith
- More interactive sessions required
- Vegetarian lunch very suitable for all – very good
- Future events – find out all the faith organisations and invite them, we just received info from 4th/5th person
- Critical that a sub-regional structure is adopted to establish a viable Regional voice
- What will really count is what happens AFTER the Conference
- Too many speakers, not enough debate and dialogue
- No water provided – only tea/coffee and orange
- A hard working Organisation team which would do proud to any event
- Good cross section of people active in faith and community work
- Very confusing having TWO WORKSHOP 1's!
- Workshop 1 (room B) was disappointing
- Very stimulating, interesting afternoon session
- It was very good – thank you so much
- First time I have attended such an interfaith event and found the talks, discussions and chats over coffee fascinating
- Good comments, observations and action points came out but not sure whether these would form clear basis for way forward
- I was a late registrant but Alison West ensured all the necessary details were promptly emailed to me – much appreciated.
- Found the speakers interesting and diverse. Plenty to think about and take back for colleagues
- Would like to see all the comments from the workshops
- Very well done. As someone who, in my previous non ministerial life, ran Conference centres, I found this well organised.
- Found it very useful (first visit). Opened my mind.
- Thoroughly valued the key speakers
- The workshop I attended didn't get going
- Excellent event. Well organised. Comfortable and clear presentations
- Networking with 3 or 4 forums would prove better results as SE is a very big region to keep in touch and have dialogue with
- More community involvement will be very beneficial (in feedback session)
- Excellent buffet
- Thanks to the helpful (though busy) team!
- A lot of goodwill and courtesy shown but seeming to be feeling its way forward.
- Website – good to see it developing as a place to visit and keep in the loop – thank you.

- Questions could have been sorted and allocated ahead of time to allow more representative exposure
- SE Interfaith Forum needs to happen as a coordinator and regional voice
- Feedback session – always lose the detail which is the interesting bit
- Afternoon speakers were the most useful
- Feedback session – seemed very muddled. The key points were not clearly elaborated
- PowerPoint slides difficult to read – type too small
- Interfaith Forum – needs to be more input from local initiatives
- Given this was on Interfaith – we didn't start/conclude with a reflection/prayer
- Quality speakers
- Much better than I feared
- Well presented and informative
- What a pity that 'Faiths Together' could not find a cohesive prayer to start/end the Conference!
- Difficult to have a discussion in the Conference rooms
- Why no spiritual group connection i.e. starting meditation, finishing meditation?
- Joining in our awareness of God is what I really want
- Wonderful opportunity to feel connected with the genuine-ness in everyone
- Hopefully it will give guidance to establish what the Forum should embrace
- Small group facilitator gave a sermon and did not allow others to contribute
- Afternoon Q&A session not chaired well and missed a valuable opportunity.
- Workshop feedback session lacked clarity and purpose. To have a feedback session without the facilitator is not good. Feedback from my workshop merely re-stated the question!
- Speaker presentations could have been more challenging
- Appears to be no direction or shared purpose for the network. There was nothing new and I felt we were eloquent in our ignorance and afraid of being honest
- Appears to be no common purpose or direction – whose agenda is this and to what end (SE Interfaith Forum)?
- Very instructive, thank you.
- It was so positive
- Excellent key speakers – feel we could all learn a great deal from the Hindu approach to assimilation
- Organisation team - thank you very much for all your hard work