



**Minutes of the East of England Faiths Council meeting held on
Thursday 15 December 2011
St John's Innovation Centre, Cambridge**

Chairs: Richard Inwood (RI) and Ellis Weinberger (EW)

1 Welcome

RI welcomed everybody to the meeting.

2 Minute of silence

Jim Platts introduced a moment of silence – ‘the same spirit breathes on all of us...’.

3 Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the 21 September meeting were accepted as a correct record.

4 Hindu Perspectives on Inter Faith Dialogue

RI welcomed and introduced Ramesh Pattni (RP). Mr Ramesh Pattni BSc (Hons), MBA, MA, MSt (Oxford), has been actively involved in the community in teaching and interfaith dialogue over many years and is currently the Chair of the Interfaith Committee of the Hindu Forum of Britain.

He is also a Trustee of the Chinmaya Mission UK, Faith based Regeneration Network and the National Council of Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education. He is the Co Chair of the Hindu Christian Forum and Secretary to the Council of Dharmic Faiths UK.

He is currently at Oxford University as a postgraduate in the Faculty of Theology researching on Yoga Psychology.

RP began by explaining that Hinduism has a great respect for others while witnessing to its own traditions. Hinduism is thought to be more than 10,000 years old and is a very complex religion but there are some basic principles common to all its core traditions: it does not ascribe uniqueness and universality to any religion but gives an intrinsic value and sincere respect to all religions. Profession of doctrine etc. is a secondary consideration. Individual religions are historical formulations of a single religion and religious pluralism is essential: no religion is definitive or absolute, all are subject to evolution and re-interpretation and every religion is worthwhile and efficacious. Rites and outward observances are non-essential; Hinduism generally refuses the idea of religious institutions or organisations. Divine revelation is not exclusive to any religion, revelation is a continuous process in all religions. Historicity has no special appeal and Hinduism is not founded on past events. An individual's final destiny is not decided in one life. Hinduism has two main models for inter faith dialogue. One is to stick to one's own religion, neither convert nor be converted, be vigorous about one's own boundaries while respecting the rights of others. The second is to step out of the boundaries and into other territories, seeing the other through one's own eyes and understanding.

RI thanked RP for his informative and helpful talk.

5 Questions and discussion

Simon Banks (Quaker) particularly liked what RP had said about continuous revelation but some alarm bells had rung as he thought it was possible to imagine a religion that would be entirely mistaken and damaging. RP hoped that people would be seeking truth through meditation, then forming concepts and ideas, but agreed that it might be possible for a religion to be created that might go against the continuous revelation and lead people into wrong ways.

Cathy Michell (Hills Road Sixth Form College) asked about Hindutva, which seems to her to be a different kind of Hinduism. RP responded that Hindutva involves a national and political identity and the politicisation of religion, although India has a secular constitution, and he is not sure whether this has anything to do with true Hinduism but is a particularly narrow dimension. CM added that it seems very combative towards other religions and RP agreed.

Betty Saunders (Welwyn Hatfield Inter Faith Group) asked what the Hindu perspective on climate change is. RP replied that the core idea of Hindu dharma expresses a relationship between the individual and the community and the environment; everything is a manifestation of the divine and deserves respect and care – the eater, the eaten and the eating.

Manwar Ali (JIMAS) asked about the Hindu attitude to conversion. RP responded that the scriptures tell Hindus not to disturb another's faith; Hinduism does not claim exclusivity and would prefer to explain rather than convert. MA felt that if you love somebody you would want them to follow your path and would be hurt if they did not. RP agreed that this would be personally hurtful but Hinduism teaches that people are free to follow other paths.

Prudence Jones (Pagan) said that Paganism and Hinduism have much in common, including the belief that there are many paths to the divine, but she wondered whether making this claim is not itself making an absolute claim. RP agreed that this is the case, but thinks that the answer to this is in the religious experience, the highest truth received by transcendence into consciousness.

At this point RI handed over to EW.

6 The centenary of the visit of 'Abdu'l-Baha, son of the Founder of the Baha'i faith, to Britain

EW introduced Virginia Barnes (VB), deputising for Wendi Momen, who had to be absent for family reasons. VB explained that this centenary is a very special anniversary for members of the Baha'i faith in Britain. She told the meeting that 'Abdu'l-Baha (1844-1921) was imprisoned with his father at the age of eight and suffered exile and further imprisonment until his release in 1908 following the revolution of the Young Turks. He had succeeded his father as leader on the latter's death in 1892. Following his release he undertook several journeys to the West between 1910 and 1913 during which he spoke about key Baha'i principles such as the unity of God, unity of religions, equality of men and women and racial equality. He was a man of selfless service to humanity, showing loving generosity to all.

7 Mental Health and Spirituality

EW introduced Kathleen Ben Rabha (KBR) who has worked as a Community Affairs Advisor in Suffolk for some six years, with the aim of encouraging local churches to engage confidently with the communities in which they are located. Although she is a generalist, there is scope for work on specific social issues such as Mental Health. This, together with Domestic Violence, is an issue that affects 1 in 4 of the population and hence will be an issue for most faith communities at some point.

KBR spoke about developments in the area of mental health and spirituality and some work being done in Suffolk. She said that the place of spirituality in mental health has been a neglected area and often overlooked by medical staff because they were influenced by a biomedical model. More recently there has been interest shown in spirituality by psychiatrists in particular and different ideas have been emerging about dealing with mental ill health, a more holistic approach, which includes a recognition of spirituality. This is being discussed at a seminar being held at the end of January. Research carried out for the Royal College of Nursing suggests that nurses have seen the importance of spirituality in their nursing practice, but that this has not been reflected in their training. KBR feels that there are now more opportunities for faith groups to open a dialogue with mental health professionals; to offer resources for nurse training programmes – for example, work on this is being done with the new NHS Trust for Norfolk and Suffolk; to speak about mental health openly and without fear in our own communities.

EW thanked KBR for her interesting presentation and invited questions.

Simon Wilson (Diocese of Norwich) agreed that there is an increasing amount of work being done in this field, and wondered how best to engage with and provide signposting for people who may have been harmed by faith communities. KBR feels that there must be a balanced approach; mental health professionals need to be alert to this, and also not to assume that religious language is a sign of psychosis, and faith communities may be able to support them to discern the patient's needs.

Peter Hayler (Gt St Mary's University Church) referred to a religious literacy programme being used in Higher Education that might help with this. See www.religiousliteracyhe.org

A handout was available and will be circulated with the minutes.

8 Report on Faiths Council projects and matters

EW asked Jenny Kartupelis (JK) to give her update, and she began by saying that it was good to see so many people at this meeting. She mentioned a video called 'With a little help from my friends', addressing issues of how worship groups (especially churches) could offer help to mental health patients, whom research has shown are more likely to go to a church than their friends when leaving mental health treatment. This video was produced many years ago for the Diocese of Ely, but much of it remained valid and useful..

Inter Faith Week

JK congratulated all the Local Inter Faith Organisations who had held such a variety of successful events around the region. She and Anne Littlefair had enjoyed being at as many as possible. The Week had also seen the formal launch of the Interfaith Council for Huntingdon and District, and Thurrock Faith Matters.

Local Authorities

EEFC had established a programme of work with each of the seven funding Local Authorities, and the next stage was to help them share that knowledge and learning. EEFC would be holding a meeting for its contacts in the LAs to come together.

Survey of Councillors

EEFC and the East of England Local Government Association (EELGA) had undertaken the survey, obtaining responses from 140 elected members, finding out more about their attitudes to working with faith groups, and how they could be supported in doing this if they wished. The report arising from the survey was in early draft stage, and being discussed with a small reference group of councillors and officers. It would be available and circulated in January.

Events

The event in Stevenage on 26 January, *Faith in Democracy*, supported by Hertfordshire County Council and the GMC, had been promoted and was getting a good response. This would focus on changes in government policy and the opportunities/challenges arising for faith groups. Details available on the reception desk or by emailing eefc@cambcatalyst.co.uk.

EEFC was working with Peterborough City Council to hold an event on 6 March on Faith and Emergency Planning – JK asked people to note this for diaries, and invitations would be sent region-wide in January.

Guidance for faith groups engaging with government

This document was at design stage with the Essex County Council team, and would be available at the above event in January.

Matters arising from last meeting

At the last meeting, those attending had worked in small groups to give ideas and views on EEFC meetings, and a number of points had been recorded. Of these, EEFC had been able to take immediate action on two.

Acoustics of the room were a problem, so a microphone had been borrowed for the current meeting, but the room was being refurbished and was likely to have an integral sound system in the future.

People had wanted more time for networking, and this was now allowed for in the agenda. They had also wanted more presentations from external speakers and more updates, so the Board was considering whether meetings should be longer, bearing in mind the working day and travel times.

The need for better public transport or car sharing had been raised. The new guided bus would be a good way of reaching the venue, but ceased to run after 6.00pm. If delegates noted, when registering for a meeting, where they were driving from and what car space they had, it may be possible for EEFC to suggest car share partners to those without.

Follow us on Twitter

JK reminded delegates that EEFC was offering updates by Twitter, and people can link in as 'followers' on home page of the EEFC web site. People could send material to be added or re-tweeted, and should sign up as followers to hear about e.g. events, funding available.

At the end of her report JK handed back to EW, who explained that RI is leaving the EEFC Board, thanked him warmly for his support, hard work and wisdom, wished him well for the future and presented him with a gift. RI thanked the meeting for these good wishes for his retirement and said that he felt it had been a privilege to have worked with EEFC and he had learned a lot from it.

9 Meet your Neighbour

Graham Thompson then introduced the 'speed dating' extended networking period.

10 Dates of next meeting

Thursday 22 March 2012

Tuesday 12 June 2012

Thursday 27 September 2012

Thursday 13 December 2012

Priscilla Barlow
January 2012

EAST OF ENGLAND FAITHS COUNCIL

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Attending Delegates

		Organisation	Faith
Gwen	Andrews	East of England Faiths Council	
Simon	Banks		Quaker
Tony	Barker	Church and Community	Christian (Baptist)
Priscilla	Barlow	Cambs Ecumenical Council	Christian (RC)
Virginia	Barnes	Cambridgeshire SACRE	Baha'i
Kathleen	Ben Rabha	Diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich	Christian (Anglican)
Valerie	Berkson	Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum	Jewish
Cliff	Broadhurst	Braintree District Inter Faith Forum	Christian
Anne	Brown	Methodist District, Beds, Essex, Herts	Christian (Methodist)
John	Brown	Churches Tourism Assoc	Christian (Anglican)
Andrew	Cogan	COVER	
Stephen	Conway	Diocese of Ely	Christian (Anglican)
Geoffrey	Cook	Commission for Dialogue & Unity	Christian (RC)
David	Dean	St Philip's Centre, Leicester	Christian (URC)
Tim	Elbourne	Diocese of Ely	Christian Anglican
Jnanamitra	Emmett	EEFA	Buddhist
Bertie	Everard	Welwyn & Hatfield Inter Faith Group	Christian (URC)
Sean	Finlay	Wisbech Interfaith Forum	Christian (RC)
Stephen	Harmer	East of England Faiths Council	Christian
Peter	Hayler	Great St Mary's University Church	Christian (Anglican)
Paul	Hills	Eastern Baptist Association	Christian (Baptist)
Cass	Howes	Univ of Bedford / Bedford Council of Faiths (BCoF)	Christian (Methodist)
Richard	Inwood	Diocese of St Albans	Christian (Anglican)
Chris	Jenkin	Cambridge Street Pastors	Christian
Prudence	Jones	East of England Faiths Agency	Pagan
Jenny	Kartupelis	East of England Faiths Council	Christian
Anne	Littlefair	EEFC Faith Development Officer	Christian (Methodist)
Nasim	Mavaddet	Cambridge Baha'i Community	Baha'i
Jonathan	Meyrick	Diocese of Norwich	Christian (Anglican)
Cathy	Michell	Cambridgeshire SACRE	Christian (Methodist)
Jafar	Mirza	Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education (FBFE)	Muslim
Ivor	Moody	Mid Essex Inter Faith Group/Essex Mind and Spirit	Christian (Anglican)
Peter	Mortimer	Diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich	Christian (Anglican)
Martin	Naylor	Diocese of St Albans	Christian (Anglican)
Thak	Patel	Think India/Huntingdon Faiths Forum	Hindu
Ramesh	Pattni	Hindu Forum of Britain	Hindu
Jim	Platts	University of Cambridge	Quaker
Reynold	Rosenberg	Welwyn & Hatfield Interfaith Group	Jewish
Nahid	Salmanpour	Cambridge Baha'i Community	Baha'i
Betty	Saunders	Welwyn & Hatfield Inter Faith Group	Christian (Methodist)
Rubina	Shaikh	Bedford Council of Faiths (BCoF)	
Natu Bhai	Solanki	Hindu Temple/Community Centre, Dunstable	Hindu
Graham	Thompson	Methodist Church, EA District	Christian (Methodist)
Lesley	Turney	East of England Faiths Council	
Anwar	Usmani	Luton Council of Faiths	Muslim

		Organisation	Faith
Ellis	Weinberger	Jewish Community, Cambridge / EEFC	Jewish
Malcolm	Whalan		
Steve	Williams	Diocese of Chelmsford	Christian (Anglican)
Simon	Wilson	Diocese of Norwich	Christian (Anglican)
Patricia	Wyman	Cambridge Regional College	Quaker

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Apologies

		Organisation	Faith
M Manwar	Ali	JIMAS	Muslim
Donald	Allister	Diocese of Peterborough	Christian (Anglican)
Mirza	Baig	Pakistan Cultural Association	Muslim
Darren	Barlow	Thurrock Inter Faith Forum	Christian (Anglican)
Paul	Bayes	Diocese of St Albans	Christian (Anglican)
Andrew	Coleby	St Albans Diocese	Christian (Anglican)
Geoffrey	Colmer	Central Baptist Association	Christian (Baptist)
Nigel	Cooper	ARU Chaplaincy/Cambs SACRE	Christian (Anglican)
Stephen	Copson	Central Baptist Association	Christian (Baptist)
Murray	Corke	Cambridge Interbeing Sangha	Buddhist
Stephen	Cottrell	Diocese of Chelmsford	Christian (Anglican)
Sandra	Culham	Colchester Borough Council	
Paul	Daltry	Minister for Church and Community Engagement	
Paul	Ewans	Cambridge Regional College	Humanist
David	Gillett	Norwich InterFaith Link	Christian (Anglican)
Kevin	Hand	Faith Woodlands Communities	
Alan	Hargrave	Ely Diocesan Board for Church in Society	Christian (Anglican)
Graham	Hedger	Diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich	Christian (Anglican)
Walter	Herriot	East of England Faiths Council	
Robert	Hill	Diocese of Peterborough	Christian (Anglican)
Pam	Hinds	Cambridge Interbeing Sangha	Buddhist
John	Holbrook	Diocese of Peterborough	Christian (Anglican)
Paul	Holifield	Salvation Army	Christian (Salvation Army)
Graham	James	Diocese of Norwich	Christian (Anglican)
David	Jonathan	Grassroots and Luton Council of Faiths	Christian
Richard	Jordan	Chelmsford Diocese	Christian (Anglican)
Ram Singh	Kalra	Punjabi Indian Comm Assoc	Sikh
Tahir	Kamran	Cambridge Muslim Council / EEFC	Muslim
Sushila	Karia	Hindu Cultural & Heritage Centre Ltd	Hindu
Brian	Keegan	Peterborough Interfaith Council	Christian (RC)
Jawaid	Khan	Peterborough City Council	Muslim
Ryad	Khodabocus	Luton Council of Faiths	Muslim
Habib	Khokhar	Ahmadiyya Muslim Association	Muslim
David	Lloyd	Herts County Council	
Cheryl	Lowe	Church Schools of Cambridge	Christian
Jay	MacLeod	Diocese of St Albans	Christian (Anglican)
Paul	Main	Salvation Army (Central South)	Christian (Salvation Army)
Dina	Mandalia		Hindu
Sheila	Martin	Eastern Baptist Association	Christian (Baptist)
Mary Clare	Mason	Faith and Cohesion Network	Christian (RC)
Thomas	McMahon	RC Diocese of Brentwood	Christian (RC)
Wendi	Momen	Bedford Council of Faiths (BCoF)	Baha'i
Peter	Meek	East Midlands Synod	Christian (URC)
Richard	Morgan	Church of England	Christian
Neslyn	Pearson	Faith in Queen's Park	Christian

		Organisation	Faith
Dorothy	Peyton Jones	Chaplaincy to People at Work	Christian
Andrew	Prasad	URC Thames North Synod	Christian (URC)
David	Prior	Catholic Church	Christian (RC)
Patricia	Revell	Hartington Grove Friends Meeting	Quaker
Lakhwinder	Sagoo	Cambridge Sikh Society	Sikh
Susan	Sayers	Southend Faiths Forum	
Valerie	Skottowe	Welwyn & Hatfield Inter Faith Group	Christian (RC)
Carol	Smith	Chelmsford Diocese	Christian (Anglican)
Alan	Smith	Diocese of St Albans	Christian (Anglican)
Paula	Spalding	Cambridge Regional College	Christian (Anglican)
Tim	Sweeting	YMCA Norfolk	
David	Thomson	Diocese of Ely	Christian (Anglican)
Frances	Ward	Diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich	Christian (Anglican)
Iqbal	Warsi	Anglia Ruskin University	Muslim
Malcolm	Weisman		
Peter	Wood	Cambourne Church	Christian
Tim	Yau	Yaxley Deanery	