



**Minutes of the East of England Faiths Council meeting held on
Thursday 22 March 2012
St John's Innovation Centre, Cambridge**

Chairs: Thak Patel (TP) and Ellis Weinberger (EW)

1 Welcome

EW welcomed everybody to the meeting.

2 Minute of silence

Jim Platts introduced a moment of silence – ‘silence is in each of us to use as he or she sees fit’...’we move from collective silence to inner listening’.

3 Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2011 were accepted as a correct record.

4 The Buddhist approach to working with other faiths

EW welcomed and introduced Dr Murray Corke (MC), a veterinary surgeon and university teacher, based in Cambridge. He started to practice Buddhist meditation in 1984, and met Thich Nhat Hanh’s Vietnamese Zen tradition in 1991. The Buddhist ideals of non-violence and sustainable living, seemed completely in harmony with Murray’s life-long interests in ecology and the natural world. He was ordained as a lay member of Thich Nhat Hanh’s Order of Interbeing in 1994 and became a Dharma teacher of that tradition in 2004. Murray was the Community of Interbeing representative on the Network of Buddhist Organisations for a number of years. He has facilitated Zen Buddhist retreats throughout Britain, and has co-facilitated a number of Christian – Buddhist retreats, including an ongoing series of joint events with a Quaker study centre.

MC began by stressing that his presentation was one perspective on the Buddhist position, not the only perspective. He started with a brief overview of Buddhism: the Buddha (‘enlightened one’) grew up in North India in the Vedic tradition in the sixth century BCE and gave up his life as Crown Prince to train with meditation teachers before attempting to find a true understanding of reality, and having this he continued to teach. His followers created Buddhism, which co-existed with Hinduism for millennia, and was largely monastic and based on the teachings of the historical Buddha. These teachings spread widely during this time.

In the third century BCE there was a Buddhist ‘reformation’ which saw the appearance of the Mahayana school in reaction to an insistence to strict adherence to the teachings of Buddha. ‘You should believe only what your experience tells you is true.’ Mahayana traditions respect other teachings provided that they allow people to live peaceful and happy lives and practice in a mindful way. Buddhism has always respected the existing beliefs of countries it has moved into and has tended to integrate with these beliefs to form new schools of Buddhism. This is illustrated in countries such as Tibet where Mahayana Buddhism fused with tantric and animist beliefs and gave rise to the Tibetan schools. Buddhism maintains good relationships with other traditions.

MC explained that he comes from a Christian background but parted company with Christianity while at university; about eight years later he discovered meditation and eventually came to Zen (the Japanese word for meditation), which is an experiential tradition emphasising that we already have all that we need for understanding, that everything we do can be done as meditation, all that is needed is mental discipline and openness, so that over time we can become our own teacher. Many Western converts to Buddhism have found that they can be reconciled with their previous beliefs through meditation – he certainly feels that he has a better understanding of Christianity.

It is also easy to relate to other meditation traditions as many religions share the aim of reducing the effect of the ego. He feels that all religions are based on the desire to enable people to look with equanimity on the difficulties of life e.g. poverty, suffering, death. Mindfulness practice can enable anyone to acquire deeper understanding of the connection between oneself and others and oneself and the material world.

5 Questions and discussion

Reynold Rosenberg said that he was fascinated that the dating system BCE/CE had been used. MC replied that these are used in the context of the biblical texts and he felt it was appropriate also to an inter faith context.

Mahendra Gokal asked what had caused the speaker to move from Christianity to Buddhism. MC replied that he was eight years without religion, then took up meditation to help him to sail faster having seen its effect on a friend! He then found he became interested in what lay behind it e.g. the three pillars of Zen - meditation, ethics, understanding – and he feels that if one practices meditation and ethics understanding comes.

Paula Spalding asked whether there are any modern versions of Buddhism? MC replied that his own teacher, who like many such teachers arrived as a political exile, has tried to formulate Buddhist teachings that are more accessible to Westerners.

Alan Hargrave asked about the relationship between Yoga and Buddhism. MC said that Yoga is a word used in a number of different ways. Practitioners of the Vedic tradition were referred to as Yogis. Yoga is a mental tradition but is often used to describe a physical tradition, which enables mindfulness.

Cliff Broadhurst asked for an explanation of the chanting found in Buddhism and also asked whether there is any concept of trying to convert people. MC explained that Buddhism is not an evangelising tradition. He said that chanting can be used as a preparation for meditation by stilling the mind and can also be seen as prayer e.g. chanting for the dead, and can be very helpful.

Ellis Weinberger asked about the use of mindfulness as a therapeutic intervention. MC responded that he tries not to be proprietorial about his practice and is happy that it is being recognised in this way but one issue is that it is possibly not sustainable without an ethical basis and another is the need for a community of practice.

Dina Mandalia returned to the question of the Buddhist attitude to conversion, explaining that she was born Hindu and could not imagine changing her religion. MC said that Buddhism has no god to answer to but as a practitioner one can use all the means available to improve one's practice.

At this point EW handed over to TP, who thanked MC for his informative and very helpful talk.

6 The work of the Open Out scheme

TP introduced Molly Blackburn (MB), who has been working on the Open Out scheme for over two years, a project supporting victims of Hate Crime. Prior to that she worked in the UK and internationally for projects focused on minority groups' rights and support.

MB highlighted that religious hate crime, like all hate crime, is linked to the perception of the victim and also of any witnesses – so it is not possible, for example, to pass it off as a joke or say it wasn't intended to be taken seriously – and this will be an aggravating factor taken into account for sentencing. She referred to hate crime committed in Tibet, during the Partition of India and the Holocaust (which targeted not only Jews but other groups including homosexuals, disabled people and Gypsies). Hate crime stems from prejudice – somebody taking a 'right' or superior standpoint and seeing others as different – and no prejudice is acceptable. It is important to challenge such views by e.g. supporting victims, reporting incidents, campaigning. We need to challenge our own prejudice, be non-judgmental and respectful of others. MB added that those who are victims of prejudice may also be prejudiced themselves.

TP thanked MB for a stimulating and thought-provoking presentation and invited questions. NOTE: MB's presentation is available as a PowerPoint on request.

Jenny Kartupelis asked whether there is not a danger in the fact that the law relating to hate crime is based on 'perception', especially of a third party (witness). MB agreed that this can be problematic but feels that the law is trying to prevent excuses being made for prejudiced behaviour.

Paula Spalding suggested that many people are afraid to report hate crime because they fear reprisals, and MB agreed that this is a huge barrier and very difficult to change.

Richard Jordan referred to the Dale Farm situation and suggested that it is possible to be angry about both sides of a problem. MB agreed that some situations are extremely complex and very far from straightforward, and it is necessary to work with all sides to understand and hopefully resolve such situations.

7 Report on Faiths Council projects and matters

Before making her report Jenny Kartupelis (JK) mentioned two matters of interest. First, that the Practice of Scriptural Reasoning course run by the Cambridge Inter Faith Programme is now online, and that its pioneer, Professor David Ford will be speaking at the next EEFC meeting. Secondly, that Frances Ward, who spoke at one of last year's meetings, has recently co-authored a book called 'Friendship and Fear', which is available from Blackwells Publishers.

EEFC's work programme

The Board had agreed a Business Plan for the coming financial year. EEFC was continuing to receive support from the Local Authorities of Cambridgeshire, Essex, and Thurrock, and was waiting to hear from others. It was also still receiving funding from Faith Leaders. By further using reserves, EEFC would be able to continue much of its current programme, but not all. It would support local inter faith groups through the work of the FDO, training, and events; and it would work with LAs to ensure good understanding and partnership between faith and public sector. Both web sites would be regularly updated.

Local Authorities

EEFC had held a meeting for its contacts in the seven funding Local Authorities to help them share that knowledge and learning, which had been well received.

Survey of Councillors

As a result of this survey by EEFC and the East of England Local Government Association, EEFC is hosting a focus group that will meet at the end of May to consider how EEFC can

best help with networking between councillors. EEFC is also writing a guide for councillors to working with faith groups, which will form part of their induction.

The report on the survey had been circulated in January and was on the FNE web site.

Inter Faith Week

JK said that this year, IFW will run from 18 to 25 November. EEFC is organising a preparation day for local inter faith groups on Tuesday 17 July. There will be sessions on event planning and management, media relations, and finding partners. This will also be a chance to exchange experiences and learning from previous IFWs. More information will be sent out by the EEFC office in May.

A Year of Service

This was a national government initiative, bringing together the idea of service by faith groups with particular faith festivals. There was a web page, with a link from our sites, and more information. This was a way of branding activities that were, in general, already taking place, to raise awareness of the value of faith contribution to society.

EEFC's Tenth Anniversary

There will be celebration on **Monday 25 June**, with a garden party in the grounds of the Bishop of Ely's residence. Those attending EEFC meetings will receive an official invitation in May.

Events

The event in Stevenage on 26 January, *Faith in Democracy*, supported by Hertfordshire County Council and the GMC, had been held and well attended. The presentations were on both the EEFC and FNE web sites.

EEFC had also co-hosted with Peterborough City Council an event on 6 March on Faith and Emergency Planning. The evaluation report from this indicated it had been particularly popular. It may be possible to repeat this if a local group can arrange with its own Council for supply of venue. Presentations from this event will be put on our web sites, and we will tweet when they appear.

Matters arising from discussions at September meeting

Acoustics of the room had been addressed by the installation of an integral sound system.

There had been a request for more content in the meetings, and more time for networking. JK took a straw poll of those present, asking whether they would be prepared to arrive earlier, stay later, or attend five rather than four meetings a year? There was no conclusive outcome, but more interest in staying later. It was therefore agreed that in future, the 'Meet your Neighbour' sessions should be held at the end of the event, allowing people who wished to do so, to stay on longer.

JK then invited Sue Lowe (SL) from the Office of Civil Society to speak. SL explained that the Office for Civil Society is currently looking at the role of faith in civil society, and added that the recruitment of 16 year olds for the National Citizens Service programme is getting under way.

At the end of JK's report it was suggested by TP and agreed by the meeting that the next item should be 'Dates of next meetings', leaving an open-ended period for 'Meet your Neighbour' and networking.

Dates of next meetings

Tuesday 12 June 2012, Thursday 27 September 2012, Thursday 13 December 2012

Priscilla Barlow
March 2012

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Attending Delegates

Gwen	Andrews	EEFC	Christian
Priscilla	Barlow	Churches Together in Cambs	Christian (RC)
Kathleen	Ben Rabha	Diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich	Christian (Anglican)
Molly	Blackburn	Cambridgeshire Constabulary	
Cliff	Broadhurst	BDiff	Christian
John D	Brown	Discovering Sacred Britain	Christian (Anglican)
Geoffrey	Cook	Commission for Dialogue & Unity	Christian (RC)
Murray	Corke	Cambridge Interbeing Sangha	Buddhist
David	Dean	St Philip's Centre / East Midlands Synod	Christian (URC)
Bertie	Everard	Welwyn & Hatfield Inter Faith Group	Christian (URC)
Sarah	Geary	EEFC	Christian
Mahendra	Gokal	Stevenage Gujarati Hindu Association	Hindu
Alan	Hargrave	Ely Diocesan Board for Church in Society	Christian (Anglican)
Paul	Hills	Eastern Baptist Association	Christian (Baptist)
Pam	Hinds	Cambridge Interbeing Sangha	Buddhist
Prudence	Jones	East of England Faiths Agency	Pagan
Richard	Jordan	Chelmsford Diocese	Christian (Anglican)
Jenny	Kartupelis	EEFC	Christian
Richard	Leslie	Hertsmere Forum of Faiths	Christian (Anglican)
Anne	Littlefair	EEFC Faith Development Officer	Christian (Methodist)
Sue	Lowe	Office for Civil Society	
Dina	Mandalia		Hindu
Jafar	Mirza	Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education (FBFE)	Muslim
Ivor	Moody	Diocese of Chelmsford	Christian (Anglican)
Peter	Mortimer	Diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich	Christian (Anglican)
Thak	Patel	Think India / EEFC	Hindu
Dorothy	Peyton Jones	Chaplaincy to People at Work	Christian
Jim	Platts	University of Cambridge	Quaker
Reynold	Rosenberg	Welwyn & Hatfield Inter Faith Group	Jewish
Paula	Spalding	Cambridge Regional College	Christian (Anglican)
Graham	Thompson	Methodist Church, EA District	Christian (Methodist)
Ellis	Weinberger	Jewish Community, Cambridge / EEFC	Jewish
David	Wilman	Cambridge Interfaith Group	Christian
Patricia	Wyman	Cambridge Regional College	Quaker

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Apologies

Donald	Allister	Diocese of Peterborough	Christian (Anglican)
Simon	Banks		Quaker
Tony	Barker	Church and Community	Christian (Baptist)
Paul	Bayes	Diocese of St Albans	Christian (Anglican)
Herman	Beetge	More Than Gold	
Anne	Brown	Methodist District, Beds, Essex, Herts	Christian (Methodist)
J Duncan	Campbell	St Hugh and St John's Church	Christian
Andrew	Coleby	St Albans Diocese	Christian (Anglican)
Geoffrey	Colmer	Central Baptist Association	Christian (Baptist)
Stephen	Conway	Diocese of Ely	Christian (Anglican)
Nigel	Cooper	ARU Chaplaincy / Cambs SACRE	Christian (Anglican)
Stephen	Copson	Central Baptist Association	Christian (Baptist)
Paul	Ewans	Cambridge Regional College	
Sean	Finlay	Wisbech Interfaith Forum	Christian (RC)
David	Hawkins	Diocese of Chelmsford	Christian (Anglican)
Graham	Hedger	Diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich	Christian (Anglican)
Walter	Herriot	EEFC / EEDA	
John	Holbrook	Diocese of Peterborough	Christian (Anglican)
Cass	Howes	Univ of Bedford / BCoF	Christian (Methodist)
Graham	James	Diocese of Norwich	Christian (Anglican)
Chris	Jenkin	Cambridge Street Pastors	Christian
Barbara	Johnson	Chaplain Beds and Luton Fire and Rescue	Christian
David	Jonathan	Grassroots and Luton Council of Faiths	Christian
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)
Ryad	Khodabocus	Luton Council of Faiths	Muslim
Maureen	Leveton	Norwich Hebrew Association	Jewish
Richard	Lewis	Eastern Baptist Association	Christian (Baptist)
David	Lloyd	Herts County Council	
Jay	MacLeod	Diocese of St Albans	Christian (Anglican)
Paul	Main	Salvation Army (Central South)	Christian (Salvation Army)
Hilary	Marlow	Cambridge Interfaith Programme	
Sheila	Martin	Eastern Baptist Association	Christian (Baptist)
Ralph	Meloy	Diocese of Chelmsford	Christian (Anglican)
Jonathan	Meyrick	Diocese of Norwich	Christian (Anglican)
Richard	Morgan	Church of England	Christian
Pat	Mungroo	Ethnic Minority Network	
Neslyn	Pearson	Faith in Queen's Park	Christian
Andrew	Prasad	URC Thames North Synod	Christian (URC)
Shahana	Ravenscroft	Cambs Constabulary	Muslim
Lakhwinder	Sagoo	Cambridge Sikh Society	Sikh
Janet	Scott	Cambs Ecumenical Council / SACRE	Quaker
Valerie	Skottowe	Welwyn & Hatfield Inter Faith Group	Christian (RC)

Alan	Smith	Diocese of St Albans	Christian (Anglican)
Carol	Smith	Chelmsford Diocese	Christian (Anglican)
Dan	Smith	Hunts District Council	
David	Thomson	Diocese of Ely	Christian (Anglican)
Frances	Ward	Diocese of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich	Christian (Anglican)
Iqbal	Warsi	Anglia Ruskin University	Muslim
Paul	Whittle	URC Eastern Synod	Christian (URC)
Simon	Wilson	Diocese of Norwich	Christian (Anglican)
Alan	Winton	Diocese of Norwich	Christian (Anglican)