CAIRING FOR SCOTLAND

THE CHURCHES CONTRIBUTION TO INTERFAITH RELATIONS IN SCOTLAND
INTRODUCTION

For 14 years the Churches in Scotland had a committee specifically dedicated to developing the work of interfaith relations among Christians. It was called CAIRS, the Churches Agency for Interfaith Relations, and throughout its existence it worked hard to make sure that interfaith was seen as an integral part of the Churches’ life and mission. Members of CAIRS were individuals committed to this work; interested in exploring Christian theology in the light of our knowledge, understanding and experience of other faiths; eager to engage in dialogue and to encourage other Christians to experience for themselves the joy and excitement of the interfaith adventure.

CAIRS was successful even though its life was short in that individual Churches and denominations began to develop their own interfaith structures and members became involved in interfaith initiatives at both a local and national level. Because of this, CAIRS had difficulty defining what its specific role was in the Churches and much of its work appeared to be a duplication of that being done by its members elsewhere. The decision was made, therefore, to disband but it was felt that CAIRS had a story that should not be lost. This is a story that tells of the many Christians who have made a significant contribution to the work of interfaith relations in Scotland. It is a memory that should be kept alive, honoured and celebrated.

This short booklet is an attempt to do just that. It is not an academic study but a tribute to all those who have contributed to good interfaith relations in Scotland. We live in a country that is known worldwide for its commitment to interfaith dialogue. We have a government that supports this work and encourages dialogue with and between faiths; that strives to be inclusive of all; that listens to people of all faiths and none; that celebrates the multi-faith nature of our society.

It is a good news story and we should give thanks for the ways in which Christians and the Christian Churches have participated in this story and celebrate what they have done to initiate, support and sustain good interfaith relations in Scotland. Without them our country would be further behind in its journey towards mutual understanding, respect and cooperation between faiths.

Sister Isabel Smyth S.N.D OBE
SCOTLAND
A DIVERSE NATION

FROM THE CELTS of the first millennium BCE until the present day Scotland has been a diverse nation, a land of immigrants, all of whom have contributed to its cultural and economic development. While Christianity has been the dominant religion there have been people of ‘other’ faiths in these islands for many years.

Jews have been in Britain since the Norman Conquest and the first Jewish resident is recorded in Edinburgh in 1691. By the 1780s there was certainly a Jewish presence in Scotland. Among others we know of an American Jew, Levi Myers, who graduated in medicine from Glasgow University in September 1787 without having to take a religious oath, something required at English Universities. This made Scottish universities very attractive to members of the Jewish community and it is worth noting that Scotland never persecuted the Jews or passed any anti-semitic legislation. We also know of one Isaac Cohen who got his Burgess Certificate in 1812 allowing him to trade in Glasgow but only if he upheld the true religion and renounced Catholicism! It took however until 1823 for the Glasgow Hebrew Congregation to be established in the city.

Asians have been present in Scotland since the 1850s, and it has been suggested that Hindus and Sikhs reached as far north as Stornoway and the Western Isles. Muslims settled in the country in 1916 with the first Mosque built in Glasgow in 1944. The first Gurdwara was built in Glasgow in 1911. In the 1950s there was an influx of immigrants from the Indian Sub-continent as a result of Glasgow City Council canvassing for people to work in the public sector and also in the 1970s as a consequence of Idi Amin expelling Asians from Uganda. These immigrants then spread throughout Scotland. At present the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees means that the country has an even greater diversity of race, culture, language and religion.

But much of this diversity was not obvious. Scotland was a Christian country in which the holidays, laws, literature, values, civic rituals and education were all Christian. On the whole faith communities kept to themselves.

Scottish society has changed drastically from those days. Legislation such as the Race Relations Act outlawed race discrimination and brought equality and equality of opportunity into the public domain. Minority ethnic communities are now more visible in society and found in all the professions. People are also moving out of the closed communities in which all immigrants tend to live when they first arrive in a country and many have moved further afield to be more integrated into the wider society. Members of minority ethnic communities have become more integrated and as a result religious identity has become more important.

As society has become more diverse and as people have become aware of global and national conflicts the need for good relations between the different religious communities has become apparent. There are few from Presidents to Prime Ministers, from religious communities to Governments who would not uphold good interfaith relations as a vital contribution to peace and social cohesion.
Churches and Interfaith

Churches have also had to take account of the changing nature of society and concern to promote good interfaith relations and engage in interreligious dialogue is now part of the Churches’ agenda. But it has not always been so. The influential World Missionary Conference which was held in Edinburgh in 1910 did have a commission on the missionary message in relation to non-Christian religions. The focus was on mission but it was obvious that many missionaries, while wishing to offer the fullness of truth to be found in Christianity, recognised the worth of other faiths and had great respect for them. This attitude, however, hardened after the First World War and, according to Kenneth Cracknell, it took decades before such respect was re-awakened. When the centenary of this Conference was celebrated in 2010 there was a move to have at least one interfaith event. This did happen though the event was not included in the programme but offered as an option and took place in a Church outside the conference campus. This reflects the ambivalence of many of the Christian churches to interreligious dialogue – giving notional assent to it without devoting energy, personnel or resources to it.

However, a change in the Churches’ approach to interfaith came about in the 1960s.

For the Catholic Church the Second Vatican Council was pivotal in changing its attitude to people of other faiths. Its ground breaking document, The Church’s Relations with non-Christian Religions, called Nostra Aetate (In Our Time) after the first two words of the Latin translation was promulgated in 1965. Originally meant to be a statement about Catholic–Jewish relations it was extended to include Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. It clearly stated the belief that aspects of truth and holiness were present in these faiths and that they were to be treated with respect and reverence. This led to the setting up of a Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, which was replicated in Bishops’ Conferences throughout the world.

In other Vatican II documents such as The Declaration on Religious Liberty and The Constitution on the Church, the Catholic Church not only upheld the rights of the individual to follow the religion of their choice but also declared its respect for the religious faith and conviction of others. The Council documents urged Catholics to enter into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions and exhorted them to encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians. As brothers and sisters, made in the image and likeness of God, the Council pleaded with all to forget the past and to treat everyone with respect and reverence.

Since the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church has over and over again demonstrated its commitment to interreligious dialogue. Three times Popes have called the leaders of world faiths together in Assisi to show their commitment to and to pray for world peace. At the first Assisi gathering in 1986 Pope John Paul II said, “Either we learn to walk together in peace and harmony or we drift apart and ruin ourselves and others”.

At Easter 2000, in an unprecedented event, this same Pope went so far as to acknowledge Christianity’s sinfulness and asked pardon for attitudes of diffidence and hostility adopted towards followers of other religions, naming the Jewish community in particular - an approach copied by many Bishops’ Conferences throughout the world.

It was also in the 1960s that the World Council of Churches (WCC) began its engagement with other faiths. Having
struggled since its birth in 1948 with Christian mission and evangelisation in a world of many faiths, the WCC conference in Kandy, Sri Lanka affirmed dialogue as an appropriate approach when dealing with people of other faiths in 1967 and, after a number of multifaith dialogue consultations and events, a sub-unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies was created. For many member Churches interfaith dialogue raised serious theological concerns, particularly within the context of Mission and Christology. Much time was therefore given to clarifying the nature and purpose of interfaith dialogue and in 1979 the WCC Central Committee adopted Guidelines on Dialogue which it commended to Churches for study and reflection.

What these developments did, both within the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, was heighten the visibility of interfaith dialogue in the life of the Churches. Both organisations published materials promoting interfaith dialogue, struggled with theological concerns and issues, encouraged closer encounters between Christians and others and organised bilateral and multilateral dialogues.

In Britain it was in the 1970s that the seeds of the interfaith movement were sown by two missionary bishops. In 1976 David Brown, Bishop of Guildford wrote A New Threshold: Guidelines for the Churches in their Relations with Muslim Communities while chair of the Presence of Islam in Britain Advisory Group which had been set up by the Conference of British Missionary Societies in 1974. The following year, Bishop Leslie Newbigin wrote, Christian Responsibility Towards those of Other Faiths and Ideologies which was influential in the Assembly of the British Council of Churches (BCC) setting up its Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths (CRPOF) that same year.

When in 1990 the British Council of Churches developed into the new ecumenical instrument Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) CRPOF became the Churches’ Commission for Interfaith Relations and continued to assist Christian congregations in relating to the people of other faiths among whom they were living. In both its incarnations the Commission published material dealing with a number of issues and concerns such as interfaith marriage, the use of church premises; engaged in theological reflections; organised conferences and seminars and brought together representatives of the Churches in Britain and Ireland to share information and insight. Scotland was well represented on the Commission and the experience of a wider group to support the work of interfaith in Scotland at both the denominational and ecumenical level was invaluable to developments north of the border.

It was the networking activities of CRPOF, particularly by its first secretary, Kenneth Cracknell, and discussions about the involvement of other faiths in CRPOF’s work, that the need for a national interfaith network emerged. This was pioneered by Brian Pearce, the treasurer of CRPOF, and in 1987 the Interfaith Network of the United Kingdom was founded with the strong support of the Churches through the British Council of Churches and the Catholic Bishops’ Conference for England and Wales.
The Scottish Churches were involved in the developments south of the border and still relate to the Churches’ Forum for Inter Religious Relations as the Commission for Interfaith Relations is now called. But Scotland has developed its own interfaith structures. There are now 20 interfaith groups in the country and a national organisation, Interfaith Scotland, in which Christians and the Christian Churches have played a significant part. Denominations have also developed structures for interfaith relations. Some like the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Catholic Church have their own interfaith committees; others like the United Reformed Church, Synod of Scotland participate in their Church’s UK committee and others such as the Church of Scotland have in the past appointed an interfaith officer.

The Scottish Episcopal Church was the first Church in Scotland to set up its own Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths (CRPOF). For over 30 years it has played an important role not just within the Scottish Episcopal Church but also in encouraging other denominations in their own interfaith work. With a regular changing membership there are now a number of people within the Scottish Episcopal Church who have experience and knowledge of interfaith relations. Many of these people have contributed substantially to the interfaith scene in Scotland. For example Donald Reid, who was Associate Rector of St. John’s, Princes Street, Edinburgh, set up and was, from 2004 – 2012, the Director of the Festival of Spirituality and Peace (now called Just Festival) which is held annually in St. John’s during the month of August.

CRPOF has consistently promoted interfaith work within the Church, offering road shows in different parts of Scotland on Understanding Other Faiths and Christianity; producing material on interfaith relations including Grosvenor Essay No. 3, The Interfaith Encounter written in partnership with the Church’s Doctrine Committee and ecumenical partners; giving presentations at Provincial Conferences and General Synod; visiting places of worship including Holy Isle off Arran and the Derby Interfaith Centre.

The influence of CRPOF has been felt in other committees of the Church. So it was that the Provincial Liturgy Committee recommended that St. Molaise’s anniversary on 18th April be included in the local diocesan calendar for the Diocese of Argyll and the Isles. St. Molaise is associated with Holy Isle off Arran, now a Buddhist Centre for World Peace and Healing, and so recognising his feast day encourages prayer for Christian/Buddhist relations.

CRPOF has also worked ecumenically through its membership of the Churches’ Agency for Interfaith Relations (CAIRS) and now includes representation from the United Reformed Church, Synod of Scotland and the Methodist Church in Scotland among its membership. When in 2005 CAIRS was seeking funding for an interfaith officer, the Scottish Episcopal Church pledged £7,000 over three years to help fund it.

Within the Scottish Episcopal Church the Bishops have consistently shown commitment to interfaith dialogue. Idris Jones as Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway and then as Primus was actively involved in the work of the Scottish Interfaith Council. During his time as Bishop he ensured an episcopal presence on the Council whether it was himself or the Alan Smithson who was the retired bishop of Jarrow living in the Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway. The current Primus, David Chillingworth, Bishop of St. Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane, retains that high level of interfaith commitment. So, Scottish Interfaith Week at the end of November each year is given prominence and the Faith Leaders’ Meeting, which has been running for over a decade is also prioritized.
The Church of Scotland’s formal interfaith involvement began in the 1980s when the Joint Committee on Christian–Jewish Relations was established. From 1983 until 1998 the Church of Scotland and the Jewish Representative Council held an official dialogue which mainly took the form of academic papers, many of which focused on the Hebrew Scriptures. As is often the case with the Church of Scotland this dialogue was opened up to other denominations and certainly the Catholic Church and the Scottish Episcopal Church participated.

Towards the end of its life, the group was concerned that one part of its remit had not been fulfilled, namely to increase awareness throughout the Church of Scotland of ill-informed and sometimes anti-Semitic attitudes, not least in the interpretation of the New Testament. A series of three conferences were then run to reach a wider audience. When the group officially ended its meetings in 1998 it was intended that a small continuing group would meet once a year to ensure that relations and communications were kept open between the two communities but this initiative did not last long.

Responsibility for interfaith relations came under the remit of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and World Mission and both of these committees had representation on the ecumenical body, the Churches’ Agency for Interfaith Relations in Scotland (CAIRS). To encourage an interfaith awareness within the major departments of the Church of Scotland the Committee on Ecumenical Relations hosted a Forum on Interfaith Relations which lasted for a number of years from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. This Forum brought together representatives from many of the Church of Scotland’s departments to reflect on how interfaith relations affected their remit. It was also an opportunity to report on the work of CAIRS and the CTBI Churches’ Commission on Inter-Faith Relations.

One project undertaken by the Forum was gathering stories
from ministers and local people about their perceptions of people of other faith communities, including a story of someone’s perception of the Christian community. A CD and supplementary material was developed which was a useful resource for local churches. Following the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York on the 11th September 2001 the Forum sent letters to the chairmen of the Glasgow and Edinburgh Central Mosques, distancing the Church of Scotland from the wave of anti-Islamic feeling that swept the country at the time. It was also the case that the Moderator, Finlay Macdonald, visited the Edinburgh Mosque along with other faith leaders, an initiative that marked the start of the biannual faith leaders’ meeting that continues to this day.

The Forum ended in 2006 when responsibility for co-ordinating the Church of Scotland’s interfaith work was placed within the Mission & Discipleship Council. It was then possible to create an interfaith officer’s post and Iain Stewart was subsequently appointed. The focus of the interfaith officer was educating the members of the Church of Scotland about interfaith relations and encouraging them to participate in local interfaith groups. This was done through an interactive website, a regular newsletter, and opportunities for church members to visit places of worship. The interfaith officer also worked in partnership with other Churches and the Edinburgh Interfaith Association. Unfortunately, the post came to an end in 2012 and Iain Stewart took up the post of General Secretary of the Edinburgh Interfaith Association.

The Catholic Church in Scotland has had a Committee for Interreligious Dialogue since 2007. Before that Gordian Marshall and Isabel Smyth represented it on bodies such as the Interfaith Council and was accompanied by a number of the Scottish religious leaders, all of whom got a very warm welcome from the Assembly. When the Very Rev Finlay Macdonald was Moderator he invited representatives from the faith communities to accompany him on his Moderatorial visit to the European Parliament. It was in his time that the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities organised an interfaith pilgrimage to Israel/Palestine. For some time Dr Macdonald represented the Church of Scotland at the meetings of the religious leaders and on retirement wrote a novel, Luke Paul and the Mosque, which dealt with some of the issues facing the Church vis-à-vis interfaith relations.

Reports touching on interfaith matters have been presented to the General Assembly. The first one in 1993 entitled Mission and Evangelism in a Multifaith Society and in a Multifaith World caused some controversy, particularly surrounding theological issues mentioned in the appendices. Another report, The Inheritance of Abraham? was presented to the General Assembly in 2012 and though it did not deal specifically with interfaith matters it caused a rift with the Jewish community in Scotland who understood it as denying the State of Israel’s right to exist. Much work has been done to repair these relations since so that there is now on-going conversations between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Jewish community. The Church of Scotland has learned from this and when an Interfaith and Mission Report was presented to the General Assembly in 2014 it had been discussed with some representatives from the major world faiths beforehand to overcome any inadvertent misunderstandings.

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as the Glasgow Sharing of Faiths, CAIRS, the Scottish Interfaith Council and CTBI’s Commission on Interfaith Relations. Each in their own way tried to alert the Catholic community to documents and developments in interreligious dialogue coming from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome. They also petitioned the Scottish Catholic Bishops to set up a Committee for Interreligious Dialogue, recognising the importance of a group through which they could report to the Catholic Bishops’ Conference in Scotland on the work of interfaith and encourage more Catholic involvement. The Committee for Interreligious Dialogue is chaired by a Bishop and works in partnership with other Catholic bodies. Its focus is on educating the Catholic community about interfaith relations and alerting the Bishops’ Conference to developments within the Church and the wider society.

With the Conforti Institute it organises several events: days for school pupils to help them prepare for Scottish Interfaith Week; a residential Christian–Muslim youth event; and a residential education weekend on a major world religion. In the Jesuit Centres in Edinburgh and Glasgow it has set up a programme of Conversations in Faith with representatives of the major faiths as well as talks on the major world faiths and related interfaith issues.

The Committee for Interreligious Dialogue also takes responsibility for sending out letters of greeting from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to the faith communities in Scotland on their main festival, accompanied by a letter from Archbishop Mario Conti who is the current chair of the Committee. It also writes to Catholic parishes to alert them to Scottish Interfaith Week and encourages their participation in it. Each year there is a reception for faith communities. The relaxed atmosphere of this event and the opportunity to engage in dialogue has offered an opportunity for the reconciliation of the inevitable tension which belongs to the work of interfaith relations. It was during one of these receptions that the Jewish community made contact with the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to begin a conversation over The Inheritance of Abraham? report.

At present there is an on-going dialogue between the Catholic Church with the Shia Muslim community at the instigation of the Edinburgh Ahlulbayt Society.

Smaller denominations do not have the resources for a separate interfaith committee but many of them such as the United Reformed Church, Synod of Scotland, the Methodist Church in Scotland, the Salvation Army and the Society of Friends have Scottish representation on their UK Interfaith Committees. The United Reformed Church, Synod of Scotland and the Methodist Church in Scotland are represented on the Scottish Episcopal Church’s Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths (CRPOF). All the Christian denominations who are members of Interfaith Scotland are invited to the joint meeting of CRPOF and the Catholic Bishops’ Committee for Interreligious Dialogue which takes place each year.
The Churches’ Agency for Interfaith Relations (CAIRS) came into being when Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) was established in 1990. CAIRS’ origins lie in the Church of Scotland’s Community and Race Relations Group (CRRG), which had been set up in the 1960s to do exactly what the title suggests. Like many Church of Scotland initiatives this group was extended to become an ecumenical body with representatives from the other churches. While its focus was on race relations, many of its discussions touched on the interfaith dimension of a Scottish society that was becoming ever more multifaith and multicultural.

During the discussions preceding the setting up of ACTS, the CRRG debated whether it should continue as one body or split into two: one focussing on race and the other on interfaith relations. Recognising the danger of conflating the two issues, the decision was made for two organisations and so CAIRS, the Churches’ Agency for Interfaith Relations and SCARJ, the Scottish Churches’ Agency for Racial Justice were born. Each developed separately and, while for a time there was mutual representation on both bodies, any attempts to work together made little progress.

The first meetings of CAIRS took place in Scottish Churches’ House, Dunblane, with representation from the major Christian denominations in Scotland under the chairmanship of Alastair Hunter from the Theology Department of Glasgow University. Most of the members had been nominated by their Churches because of their interest and involvement in interfaith relations so there was a certain amount of expertise in the committee from the beginning. In the early days it was important to establish the purpose of the organisation and work out how to develop an interest in interfaith relations in ACTS and among its member churches. Recounting those early days members remember a lot of talk about theology, some of which was challenging and surprising as they realised the quite different theological positions there were in the group in spite of a common desire to establish good working relations between people of different faiths. One of the successes was the organisation of a Scottish Christology Conference in 2002. Contributors included Dr Edward Kessler, the founding Director of the Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations in Cambridge, Professor Perry Schmidt-Leukel, the then Director of the Centre for Interfaith Studies at Glasgow University, Dr (now Prof) Helen Bond from New College, University of Edinburgh and Dr Clark Pinnock who was then the Professor of Theology at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. The conference was very well attended and the proceedings put into a booklet, The Way, the Truth and the Life which is still a useful resource for Christians.

From the beginning of CAIRS it became clear that the Churches were more at ease with race relations than they were with interfaith, which was a new area of engagement for many of them. It was going to be difficult to persuade the Churches that interfaith relations was integral to their life of mission and discipleship and necessary if the Church was to live in the contemporary world. One way of doing this was to have a CAIRS’ representative on all the ACTS’ commissions to remind people that the work the Church was undertaking had or could have an interfaith dimension to it. CAIRS’ representatives were to be the interfaith conscience of the Churches.

But, this proved difficult to implement. CAIRS’ members did for a time sit on ACTS’ committees and it was at one of these meetings that Archbishop Mario Conti pointed out that CAIRS was not an integral part of ACTS but was an agency of the Churches and a way of the Churches working together.
Rather than being part of ACTS it was a parallel body, working in association with ACTS. The question then arose as to how CAIRS should be accountable to the Churches and what activities could it engage in to make Christians aware of the beliefs and practices of other faiths.

Publicity was one answer and an attractive leaflet was designed which set out the aims of the organisation as

- **making Christians aware of the presence, beliefs and practices of the faith communities around them**
- **encouraging mutual respect and appreciation**
- **promoting interfaith dialogue**
- **helping all to benefit from the riches to be found in all traditions**

The leaflet explained what interfaith dialogue is: a religious partnership without hidden agendas or motives, involving attitudes of respect, listening, sincerity, openness and willingness to receive and to learn from others. Far from involving any compromise, interfaith dialogue was seen as leading to a deeper understanding of one’s own faith and of God who calls all people to the fullness of life. Information about and quotations from some of the world religions showed the wisdom to be found in other traditions and it was hoped that the distribution of the leaflet would help the Churches take the first steps on the interfaith journey.

Publicity, however, was not enough and thoughts turned to development work. SCARJ had always had a development officer, paid for by the churches but the churches had never supported CAIRS in the same way. A proportion of the money paid into Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) did come to CAIRS but not enough for a salary for a paid worker. Dominic Ind and Isabel Smyth, both of whom had long experience in interfaith work, volunteered to take this aspect of the work forward. They devised workshops covering topics such as Dialogue in the life of Jesus, Christian Attitudes to Different Faiths, Issues and Concerns in Interfaith Relations, Practical Ways for Getting Involved in Interfaith Relations which they took the length and breadth of the country. These were very well received and showed that an interest in interfaith relations was alive among congregations. They set up a mobile display which Churches could borrow, they organised educational days at Scottish Churches’ House to give Christians an opportunity to learn about different faiths, they organised visits to places of worship, all of which were successful and well attended.

For ten years Gordian Marshall and Isabel Smyth were involved in working with St Mungo’s Museum to host an annual Meet Your Neighbour event. Over the first weekend in June members of the various faiths present in Glasgow put on a display about their faith and were present in the Museum to meet members of the public. There were also workshops and story-telling sessions for children and a concert on the Sunday afternoon. Although this event was initiated by a Christian organisation it was only successful because of the co-operation of all faiths. These partners eventually formed a multifaith planning group which owned and organised the event for the years of its existence.

While Dominic Ind and Isabel Smyth put a lot of time and energy voluntarily into the development of CAIRS, they were both working and had many other commitments. Dominic was a busy parish priest, Isabel a teacher heavily involved in setting up the Scottish Interfaith Council. Nevertheless, hopes for a full-time development officer grew and plans were made to seek funding for this post. Unfortunately the Catholic Church in Scotland and the Church of Scotland felt unable to make a contribution. However, a substantial donation from the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and the Jesuits and smaller donations from the smaller denominations made it possible to appoint Andrew Sarle to the post of part time CAIRS'
Interfaith Education Officer in 2004. Andrew continued the development work by organising study days at Scottish Churches’ House, running workshops and setting up a database for an interfaith newsletter. Although CAIRS had obtained funding for the post, Andrew was employed by ACTS and was used for some of its work and concerns, for example attending a CTBI meeting of ecumenical instruments in Prague. This arrangement meant that ACTS had an awareness of interfaith issues at its core. However it also meant that any potential the CAIRS committee had hoped for was not realised.

Unfortunately funding was not available long-term to extend Andrew’s contract and at the end of three and a half years CAIRS was back to square one. With no member of staff, its work was limited. The committee did continue to meet regularly and it designed a Power-point presentation with commentary to encourage members to offer sessions in their respective Churches. It also arranged visits to places of worship but there was not the energy to take forward this work with any enthusiasm.

By this time ACTS had reorganised and CAIRS had become an Associated Ecumenical Group and, while it had secretarial support from ACTS, it felt a bit detached from the Churches. So in March 2014 CAIRS, the Churches’ Agency for Interfaith Relations, agreed to disband, at least for the time being. It was not that the members considered the work of interfaith relations to be unimportant or even that they were on a firm foundation. Rather, the Church representatives were all engaged in interfaith activities elsewhere at both national and local level, as well as within their own denominations and CAIRS’ meetings were in danger of becoming an additional burden. CAIRS had struggled for a number of years, finding it difficult to get office bearers with the time to take the work forward and develop an agenda which did not repeat work being done elsewhere.

The catalyst for this decision had come from the Scottish Episcopal Church’s Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths. At a meeting in January 2013 it had proposed that the Churches in Scotland should put their energy into interfaith involvement in the national body, Interfaith Scotland, and the many local interfaith groups that had grown up throughout the country. With some regret that the ecumenical dimension of the Churches’ interfaith work might be lost, the CAIRS’ committee agreed that to disband was the best way forward for the present.

However the ecumenical dimension of the Churches’ interfaith work has not been lost and a pattern is developing of an annual meeting between the Scottish Episcopal Church’s Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths and the Catholic Church’s Committee for Interreligious Dialogue to which those who represent their Churches on Interfaith Scotland are invited. This gives an opportunity for joint working and discussion of relevant issues. This means that while CAIRS is no longer a structure within the Scottish Churches its work of ecumenical collaboration and interfaith engagement continues so there is a legacy from its existence.
The Christian Church has had a long history with the Jewish people, not all of it positive by any means. From the end of the 19th century into the 20th the Churches in Scotland were very much aware of the presence of their Jewish neighbours. Support was offered to needy immigrant Jews, sometimes, as with the Free Church of Scotland and the Church of Scotland, through missionary welfare societies which hoped for their conversion to Christianity. However the Balfour Declaration, with its promise of a Jewish homeland and the growing anti-Semitism in Europe, culminating in the Nazi atrocities, set aside concern over evangelisation. Christians protested against anti-Semitism and Nazism. Some ministers invited Rabbis to preach in their Churches and a Jewish-Christian Society was formed in 1938 in Glasgow which featured lectures on aspects of Jewish and Christian questions. This was a forerunner of the Joint Committee on Christian–Jewish Relations set up by the Church of Scotland in 1983. The following year in 1984 Edinburgh set up its own Jewish–Christian Fellowship. In 1935 Trinity Church in Glasgow even had an interfaith service which featured sermons on Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism.

It was against this background that the Council of Christians and Jews was established in 1942 by Chief Rabbi Joseph H. Hertz and William Temple, soon to be the Archbishop of Canterbury. The West of Scotland branch did not come into being until more than twenty years later in 1986. The inspiration for this came from Walter Sneader from the Jewish community and Tom Morton, a Church of Scotland minister. It continues to this day and the three major Christian denominations are represented on the executive committee. They also make an annual contribution to support its work. This is mainly educational taking the form of public lectures on topics of common concern though the executive committee does have a programme of conversations that leads to more in-depth dialogue.
There have been several attempts to establish a Christian/Muslim Forum. The first was in 1991 when, during the Gulf War, Maxwell Craig, the General Secretary of ACTS, and Councillor Bashir Maan set up a series of meetings to develop good relations and mutual understanding between the Christian and Muslim communities. This did initiate good friendships and continued for a number of years. The agenda at that time focussed on areas of conflict in the world such as Bosnia, Sudan, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine where the Muslim communities were often being persecuted by the Christian west, though violence against Christians in India and Pakistan was also discussed. Concerns over the place of religion in society, particularly in the light of the new Scottish Parliament were also raised and discussed.

These conversations did not sustain themselves after the Scottish Parliament was reconvened and in January 2002 an attempt was made to reconstitute the group with more of an emphasis on understanding one another’s faith. This again met for a number of years and eventually petered out though contacts between the two communities continued though on a more informal basis.

Recently the Shia community has taken the initiative to initiate dialogue with the Christian communities as well as other faiths. No formal structure has been set up but opportunities to engage in dialogue have been organised and enjoyed by both communities.

There are at present 17 local interfaith groups in Scotland and Christians have been involved in setting up and sustaining many of these groups.

Stella Reekie, (pictured opposite) who pioneered interfaith work in Glasgow, could also be seen as the pioneer of interfaith relations in Scotland. A Deaconess in the Church of Scotland, she set up the International Flat in Glasgow and established the first interfaith group in Scotland: the Glasgow Sharing of Faiths. As a former missionary to Pakistan, Stella worked in the 1970s with the new Scots who had mostly come from India and Pakistan, helping them integrate into their new surroundings. She realised how important it was to establish understanding and respect not just between cultures but between different faiths.

The flat was owned by the Church of Scotland and managed by the Young Women’s Christian Association but was in reality Stella’s home. From there she welcomed all with great generosity and joie de vivre and people of all faiths found a space where they could relax, meet one another, share their beliefs and way of life and establish friendships which have endured to this day. Behind her commitment to this work was her war time experience when she had been present in the first days of the liberation of Belsen Concentration Camp at the end of World War Two. She had seen for herself the horror and destruction of human lives that can emerge from philosophies that judge one group to be superior to another or dehumanize people because they are different.

Perhaps the best tribute to Stella was at her funeral when Balwant Singh Saggu, a leader of the city’s Sikh community, and a good friend of Stella’s paid tribute to her,

“Stella Reekie was too great for me, too high to grasp and too great to understand. The person on the bike cannot understand the feeling of the person flying in the air. I did not understand what was meant by saying Jesus died for our sins. Now I do understand what it means. Stella died for us. She suffered for us up to her last breath, so that we the Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Bahais, Jews, Christians and others..."
could get together, enjoy ourselves together, and learn to live in love, peace and harmony. For Christians, she was a Christian, but she was something more than that. She was above labels. For me, a Sikh, Stella was a Sikh, because I could see Sikhism reflecting from her daily life. She was a saint of God and she showed us what the love of God was like. To me, she was like water, clear running water. If you pour it into a glass, it takes the shape of a glass. If you pour it into a flask, it takes the shape of a flask. She became the shape of what was needed at any time where she was. Like water, she would wash and soothe wounds. Take away dirt and quench the thirst of lonely, desperate minds.”

During the 1970s the Glasgow Sharing of Faiths committee developed its work in two main directions: it planned a programme of public meetings held each month culminating in an annual festival known as the Presentation of Faiths, and it sponsored a series of educational visits, mainly to schools, with the assistance of speakers from each faith. This dual approach proved highly successful, and the fact that so many people of other faiths and cultures have found Glasgow a city of welcome is due in some measure to the consistent, faithful work done in the name of this committee.

When Stella died in 1982 the Glasgow Sharing of Faiths was the only interfaith group in Scotland. Now there are 17 local interfaith groups from Dumfries in the south to Stornoway in the north, all working to bring people of faith together. The seeds that Stella Reekie sowed have borne fruit in a way that she would not have dreamed of. The work she began not only continues but has developed to become a dynamic movement.

The Glasgow Sharing of Faiths continued but has now developed into Interfaith Glasgow with a small team of staff delivering an interesting programme of interfaith dialogues and activities. There are also many small interfaith initiatives throughout the city as though interfaith work has a momentum that cannot be stopped.

Unfortunately the International Flat did not survive. While two more community workers were appointed by the Church of Scotland, it was sold and its resources put into another project, The Well Asian Advice Centre which opened in 1994 and is now called The Well Multicultural Centre.

In Edinburgh, Professor Frank Whaling, with his friend Lord Yousaf Inait, was instrumental in beginning the Edinburgh Interfaith Association. It was officially formed in 1989 to promote and facilitate positive engagement between the faith communities in the city. Frank, a Methodist minister, was the Professor of Religious Studies at Edinburgh University, an expert in Hinduism and author of a number of books with a great interest in interfaith dialogue, having done a doctorate in comparative religion at Harvard University. Like all local interfaith groups the Edinburgh Interfaith Association initially existed on the generosity of volunteers but funding enabled it to employ a general secretary who was able to set up a programme of activities and make partnerships with other organisations with similar concerns in the city.
The Scottish Interfaith Council grew out of the Scottish Interfaith Consultative Group which had brought together representatives from the major faith traditions to reflect on the future of faith in Scotland in the run-up to the reconvening of the Scottish Parliament. With the support of the Interfaith Network of the UK, Isabel Smyth had done some research into the possibility of a Scottish Network. Having consulted people of faith throughout the country it was obvious that there was a lot of interest in a national interfaith body but not a lot of energy to set one up because local interfaith groups, of which there were only four, were struggling to establish themselves. However, Scotland was at an interesting place in its history and the referendum of 1997 that had agreed to a Scottish Parliament meant a lot of discussion about the future of Scotland. The Churches had appointed Parliamentary Officers and it was recognised that faith communities needed to be involved in discussions about their place in the new Scotland. With John Munro as chair and Isabel Smyth as secretary, the Scottish Interfaith Consultative Group organised discussions on relevant issues such as education, the place of faith in society and negotiated dialogue between the Government and faith communities. It soon became obvious that once the Scottish Parliament was established a more formal national interfaith body would be necessary. So it was that the Scottish Interfaith Council was formally launched in October 1999 at St Mungo’s Museum by Patricia Ferguson MSP, the then Presiding Officer of the Parliament. The first chair of the newly formed Council was Rawdon Goodier from the Buddhist community.

For the Churches the question of the Christian membership was much discussed: should membership be from the ecumenical instrument ACTS or from different Christian denominations. Church members such as John Munro, Isabel Smyth and Sheilagh Kesting had been instrumental in setting up the Council but there was now concern that the Council would be unbalanced if every Christian denomination asked for membership. And yet if the Churches were represented by ACTS, individual denominations might not take the Council seriously. It was therefore agreed with ACTS that the three biggest denominations would have separate membership i.e. the Church of Scotland, the Catholic Church and the Scottish Episcopal Church. The General Secretary of ACTS was offered observer status as was the Scottish Churches’ Parliamentary Office. Originally the representatives of the Churches were individuals who played a central role in the Churches’ administration and structures. So the Church of Scotland representative was a former Moderator, the Scottish Episcopal Church representative was the Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway and the Roman Catholic representative was the Church’s representative on the Council for Christians and Jews.

Over time these representations have changed and the Churches are now represented by people interested in interfaith but not central to the Churches’ administration. Christian representation has increased to include the Methodist Church in Scotland, the Salvation Army and the Society of Friends. The General Secretary of ACTS and the Scottish Churches’ Parliamentary Officer did not attend meetings and their observer status was dropped as a result of this.

The Churches played their part in the work of the Scottish Interfaith Council. One of the first issues that arose and caused some concern to the Churches was the question of membership after an application from the Pagan Federation of Scotland had been received. While some members of the Council wanted to be as inclusive as possible others, particularly the Church of Scotland and the Catholic Church, had concerns that opening up membership to small and marginal groups could weaken the dialogue between the major world faiths. At the same time both Churches were committed to inclusiveness and did not wish to exclude bona-fide religious groups from dialogue. This question of membership was deliberated over for nearly ten years.

The Churches engaged in conversation with members of the Pagan Federation, supported their observer status in the Scottish Interfaith Council, but remained clear that there should be a recognition of the distinction between the major historical world religions and newer religious movements. In the end the solution was supported by the Churches with a two tier system of membership in which the historical major religions would be full governing members while others, including interfaith groups, would be participating associate members. This was passed when the Council changed its status to become a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) with the new name of Interfaith Scotland.

Christians have one place on the Board of Interfaith Scotland alongside the other major faith groups though representatives of the Churches continue to engage with the work of Interfaith Scotland through attendance at dialogue and other events.
The religious leaders of Scotland have been meeting regularly since 2002. The inspiration to do this came from the Catholic Archbishop of Edinburgh, Keith O’Brien, the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, Bruce Cameron, and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, Finlay Macdonald.

These churchmen felt that it was important for religious leaders to get to know one another after the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York on 11th September 2001. So often after disasters such as 9/11, religious leaders would come together to condemn the atrocity and to declare their commitment to peace. Afterwards they would return to their own communities until the next atrocity brought them together to once again declare their commitment to peace. The leaders of the three major Christian denominations in Scotland felt that such declarations should come from religious leaders who knew one another, trusted one another and so could speak together with a united voice. They requested ACTS to organise such an event and ACTS in turn turned to the Scottish Interfaith Council to ask for help in doing this.

The first meeting was held at Scottish Churches’ House, Dunblane on September 12th 2002. Represented at that meeting were the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference, the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Rabbi from Scotland’s only Reform Synagogue and the Rabbi from Giffnock and Newlands Synagogue, the Abbot of Samye Ling Tibetan Monastery, a representative from Throssel Hole Buddhist Priory, the priest from the Hindu Temple in Glasgow who at that time was the only Hindu priest in Scotland, the Imams from the Central Mosque in Glasgow and from Glasgow’s Carrington St Mosque and the Chairperson of the Baha’i Council for Scotland. There were also three representatives from the Sikh community who were not religious leaders. The meeting was jointly chaired by Kevin Franz, the General Secretary of ACTS and Rawdon Goodier, the Convener of the Scottish Interfaith Council.

The meeting offered an opportunity for the religious leaders to get to know one another and this they did by sharing a symbol from their respective religions. This was a very moving and sacred moment. In the afternoon the religious leaders shared what the values engraven on the Mace in the Scottish Parliament namely justice, wisdom, compassion and integrity meant to them and the discussion was intended to give a shared sense of civic identity.

Four of the religious leaders (Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu) produced prayer beads as their symbol and talked about how they used them in their daily religious practice. Some of them commented afterwards how impressed they were not just by the commonality of the use of prayer beads but on how it spoke of a serious religious practice. This was a meeting of people who were not only leaders in their communities but people of serious religious commitment.

There was much media interest in this first meeting which one journalist described as being as significant as the first ecumenical meeting of the Scottish Churches in the 1960s.
At first it was thought to establish an annual meeting around September 11th but the Muslims were particularly keen that the meetings should not be associated with that date. It was suggested that the meetings could take place in January or February which would connect them to the beginning of the calendar year with a sense of new beginnings.

The second meeting took place in January 2003 at the Central Mosque in Glasgow. On this occasion the topic for discussion was prayer in the various faiths. Again all the major faith communities were present. At that meeting it was agreed to meet twice a year and that these meetings should be facilitated by the Scottish Interfaith Council.

The third meeting took place in August 2003 at the Buddhist Interfaith Centre on Holy Isle, off the coast of Arran. In spite of the long journey members from all the faiths, apart from the Jewish faith, were present as was Mary Mulligan MSP, the Deputy Minister for Communities. Travelling to Holy Isle together contributed to this being a very social and happy occasion which included a pilgrimage to the cave of the Celtic saint St Molaise.

Since then the religious leaders have met in Gurdwaras, Synagogues, Mosques, the Bahai Centre, Church offices with the Chair of Interfaith Scotland and the leader from the host community chairing the meetings. They have also met in Kagyu Samye Ling Tibetan Monastery and in Aberdeen. The topics of conversation have ranged over a number of subjects: education, religion in schools, the limits of religious freedom, the future of the Scottish Interfaith Council, Scottish Interfaith Week, constitutional change, funeral rites, religion’s contribution to the health and well-being of society and the values necessary for a fair and just society.

As a result of an invitation from STV to meet in their premises the leaders thought that it might be a good idea to get out into the wider community and as a result they have met in three schools, the Scottish Parliament and elsewhere. Each time the religious leaders met in a school they were joined by pupils for the afternoon session and took part in a question and answer session which was relayed by the internal internet video system organised by Education Scotland. These tapes were then kept on file for use by Religious and Moral Education teachers.
Over the years the religious leaders have engaged in a number of activities. They have met with the youth committee of Interfaith Scotland and accepted its invitation to take part in a question and answer session at its annual conference. They have organised and participated in a Conference for religious leaders and others at Edinburgh City Chambers; they have sent a letter of protest and support for Baha’is imprisoned in Iran because of their religious beliefs. One year the leaders served Christmas dinner at the Salvation Army’s centre for the homeless in Glasgow. They responded to the Scottish Government’s consultation on St Andrew’s Day becoming a national holiday and agreed that while it was desirable that Scotland should have a national holiday, it should reflect the faith and the multicultural nature of Scottish society. This could be an opportunity for all citizens, of all faiths and none, to learn more of what it means to be Scottish.

At a recent meeting the leaders had lunch in the Scottish Parliament and met with MSPs to present a paper on the place of religion in Scotland today. This was done at the request of the Moderator of the Church of Scotland and the statement was agreed by the other leaders at their morning session.

Over the years the membership of the group has changed and expanded but the twice yearly meetings have allowed significant leaders in the major world faiths to establish bonds of friendship and to discuss areas of common concern. It has led to a trust that has allowed honesty in discussions over some difficult questions. It has helped them participate in local and national interfaith initiatives and hopefully led them to encourage the members of their communities to appreciate the importance of interfaith relations and engage in it whenever the opportunity arises.

There is much more to be said, of course, and in such a short space it is inevitable that some people’s names will have been omitted. This is a much larger story than the one contained in these pages. Hopefully what this booklet will do is keep the memory alive. Others will no doubt expand on it and continue it. The work of interfaith relations has been set on a firm foundation and, with God’s grace, it will grow and flourish in the years ahead. The Christian Churches will continue to be involved as they seek to live by and establish the values of God’s Kingdom. In all of this they, like many before them, will no doubt be inspired by the vision so beautifully set out in words attributed to Archbishop Oscar Romero:

*We cannot do everything,*
*And there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.*
*This enables us to do something,*
*And to do it very well.*
*It may be incomplete,*
*But it is a beginning,*
*A step along the way,*
*We may never see the end results,*
*But that is the difference*  
*Between the master builder and the worker.*
*We are workers, not master builders,*
*Ministers, not messiahs.*
*We are prophets of a future that is not our own*
of Trinity College, which enabled me to continue my relationship with him, visiting him in his rooms at Trinity. The other figure who stands out by way of influence was Paul Heelas, a sociologist and anthropologist. Although Paul’s specialism was ‘New Age’ spiritualities, he had much to teach about the objective study of religion. These three professors left a permanent mark on me.

While training for the priesthood at Cambridge, I asked our college principal if I might study in India. In my second year I spent Lent Term studying at colleges in North and South India, looking at two areas: Dalit Theology and Hindu/Christian Dialogue. Although this was fascinating, what I took with me from India was my stay at Shantivanam Ashram, Tamil Nadu. Here I sat at the feet of another great man, Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine monk, living the life of a sanyasi. Bede embodied these diverse cultures, remaining so British, yet living his life in an Indian village. As a 25 year old this made a considerable impact on me.

As a curate I pursued my interest in Buddhism, where seeds had been sown at Lancaster. While serving in Manchester, I joined the International Zen Association, UK (IZAUK) and true to the Liberal Catholic tradition of the parish, I started Zazen gatherings in the church!

It was no great surprise to anyone that after my curacy, I went off to Asia and travelled overland from China back to the UK. When I returned home, I was very aware that I still hadn’t been to Japan and with my particular interest in Zazen, I really should visit Japan. After a week back in the UK, I was on a plane destined for Tokyo. For the rest of that summer I stayed in a Soto Zen Temple, on Honshu Island (main island), looking across the Sea of Japan. It gave me a taste of what Bede Griffiths experienced but in Buddhism rather than Hinduism. Studying World Religions and being involved in interfaith dialogue continues to have a major impact on my life. It’s part of the reason I was a Franciscan Friar (Society of St. Francis – Anglican Franciscans), for a couple of years, focusing on a life of contemplation.

I returned home, I was very aware that my father died when I was 26 she had done her job! Mum was a professional theologian and as a teenager I started to develop an interest in World Religions. With Mum’s work in the Church of England, particularly with the Board of Social Responsibility, she was well placed to give me a wee steer. First port of call at the age of 16 was the Multi-faith Resource Unit, Selby Oak. A dynamic Irish nun, Sister Mary Hall, who had worked in Pakistan, ran a two-week course in Birmingham, to introduce people to other faiths and importantly see it in action. The course had more to do with practice than theory – I was hooked.

To start my reading in this subject, Mum gave me a seminal book, The Religious Experience of Mankind by Ninian Smart. Probably fair to say that this Glaswegian Episcopalian became the authority in the study of religions, in the English speaking world.

After school I went to Australia and when I returned to the UK, I worked in the East End of London, with a Methodist Mission in Stepney. While spending a year in East London, I met a Methodist minister called Peter Jennings and he was involved in the Council of Christians and Jews. I expressed my interest in World Religions to Peter and he told me there was only one place to study!

In 1967, Ninian Smart left Birmingham University to establish a new Department of Religious Studies at Lancaster University – that is where I was told to go and I did. It’s not an exaggeration to say that the three years spent in this Religious Studies Department shaped my life, far more so than training for the priesthood at Ridley Hall, Cambridge, which I did after Lancaster. It was an extraordinary department with some outstanding individuals. Ninian was certainly one of them and probably the most famous. Another authority in this field is John Bowker, an Anglican priest who has written widely about Religious Studies. John returned to Cambridge to be Dean

A journey with interfaith dialogue

Canon Dominic Ind

Many would say it’s hard to overemphasize the influence of our mother in our lives. That is certainly the case for myself, even though my mother died when I was 26 she had done her job!

Isabel Smyth, also of Lancaster University, running interfaith workshops. Today my actual involvement in interfaith dialogue is considerably less than it was. In the main it is limited to working at Stirling University Chaplaincy, where I am a chaplain.

However, I did say that I’ve been permanently stamped, particularly by academics at Lancaster. I would hold to that, as for example, my work as Spiritual Director and retreat leader. My involvement with other faiths, which started 35 years ago, is still alive and well, as I attempt to assist people on their journey to God.

Drawing on Zazen teaching in a Tony de Mello way, would be commonplace for me. It comes out in my sermons and what I have to say about the world we live in and how we as a Church not just exist but flourish with those of different faiths or no faith at all.

The interfaith journey has enriched my life and has indirectly touched the lives of others, through exercising my priesthood.

From Rabbi to Minister in seven generations

Rev Andrew Sarle

My father came to London from Fürth (Bavaria) in 1934, after completing his University education and being awarded a Dip Kauf (Doctor of Economics), with his thesis on the hop industry in Germany, which was the occupation of his father. He was followed to London by his mother and younger sister in 1939, after my grandfather Carl took his own life in the aftermath of Kristallnacht. In 1946 he met my mother, and they were married in 1948. I was born in 1951, and brought up in the Christian faith of my mother’s side of the family, my father’s side had for many years been only very limited in the practice of Judaism.

Grandfather Carl was a somewhat aloof parent, who ruled the family with his views on life. He forbade my aunt Lis from being involved with other Jewish girls, and from undertaking her BatMitzvah, though she disregarded his wishes and went through with it nonetheless.

Indeed, my grandfather was adamant...
that his identity was German, rather than Jewish. He fought in WW1, and was decorated with the Iron Cross First Class. His status as a veteran was one of the ways in which his family were insulated from some of the persecution of Jews as the 1930s progressed. My aunt was able to complete her Gymnasium (High School) education as the daughter of a war hero, and grandfather wore his iron cross lapel pin proudly when he was out and about. He was friendly with many of the city fathers including the local police chief – who warned him not to look out of the front windows of the family home in Friedrichstraße on the night of 9 November 1938. They survived the night unscathed, but it had shaken my grandfather to the core, and soon after that he took his own life.

My father arrived in the UK with only a few pounds in his pocket, but a relative owned a merchant bank, and agreed to sponsor him. Prior to being shipped to France as a British soldier in WW2, my father was encouraged to anglicise his name from Salimann, and he chose Sarle, thinking it sounded fairly English.

My father was not allowed to take a job, but was provided with “pocket money” in exchange for unpaid work at the bank. Eventually my father was permitted to seek a job, and worked for the bank until he retired at age 65 apart from his war service in the Pioneer Corps, as a company clerk, mainly in Scotland, and later an interpreter in Hamburg.

I grew up knowing that I was half Jewish – but the “wrong” half, and half German – but they were the recent former enemy. My mother was a regular churchgoer, and I went through the normal gamut of Sunday School, Bible Class, Church Youth Club and was an active member of a Scout Group attached to the Church we attended. I was interested in my Jewish roots, but talking about them was not encouraged. But we did take a family holiday touring Germany in 1960, and among other places visited the Hof (Back courtyard) of the family home, and the graves of family members in the New Jewish cemetery in Fürth.

From 1969 to 1973, I studied statistics at St Andrews, and on graduation moved to the Falkirk area. I worked as a maths teacher at Falkirk High School for my entire teaching career, 27 years in all, and have taken to comparing that time to the period Nelson Mandela spent in prison!

I had joined the Church of Scotland in 1980, and became an elder in the early 1990s, so on leaving teaching, I applied to become a reader (a part-time minister’s assistant) and spent 9 years working a few hours a week in local parishes. But part of my training for this role included studying for a BD at Edinburgh University where two honours courses in particular appealed to my sense of enquiry about my roots. Christianity and World Religions touched on Judaism, but Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust was quite obviously relevant in that field.

As part of the latter course, each student was required to research a seminar topic, and deliver a paper to the rest of the class. I chose to investigate the issues surrounding being a member of the Second Generation, and this was well received by my fellow students and lecturer, who were pleased to have a primary source as their seminar leader! In preparing that paper I discovered that many of the issues I faced were shared by others, including most tellingly for me, the way in which survivors were reluctant to share their experiences. My father had died a year prior to my taking this course, and much of the information about his experiences were garnered from conversations with my aunt rather than him in person. He never, to my knowledge attended Synagogue after leaving Gymnasium, but was a member of the Association of Jewish Refugees for many years and kept in touch with some of his relatives who had managed to survive the Holocaust, though many of his cousins perished.

In my three and a half years as CAIRS’ part-time Interfaith Education Officer from 2004, I became involved with members of other faith groupings and facilitating visits to their places of worship by groups of Christians. I thus attended services at the Glasgow Reformed Synagogue and the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation, and met up with their Rabbis.

Meanwhile, the Church of Scotland had created a new type of unpaid ministry, and in 2013 I became an Ordained Local Minister. To my knowledge I am the first member of either side of my family to be take on this sort of role since Jakob Dessauer (1740-1791) who was Rabbi in Demmelsdorf (or Memmelsdorf) a small village to the north-east of Bamberg. Rabbi Jakob was my four times great grandfather. His father-in-law was also a Rabbi, Mordechai Benjamin Aren.

In my travels I have visited Germany many times over the years, and have been involved in leading youth exchanges to bring young Scots and Germans together. These visits have strengthened my identification as being partly German Jewish in my origins if not in my religious practice. Two occasions in each year are times when I find this identification something of a two edged sword are at Remembrance Sunday, which I find difficult to separate from Kristallnacht, and Holocaust Memorial Day. I usually bring into the Remembrance Service I conduct in schools or Churches mention of my grandfather, and displaying his Iron Cross can make those present think about the sacrifices made by people on both sides of any war.

In 2014 I took part in a Ministers’ Familiarisation tour to Israel and the West Bank, and would have wished for more time to be available when we were in Jerusalem, as I was unable to fit in a visit to Yad Vashem, but we did manage to be present at the Western Wall at the start of Shabbat during our visit.

As a school Chaplain I am always aware that many of the children with whom I am talking are not Christians, and my previous work and study of other faiths is present in my mind in all my lesson planning. My life experience and my faith journey are inextricably linked. They share peaks and troughs. As we prepared for the Scottish Independence Referendum, I reflected on my feelings of being something of a mischling or mongrel in my ethnicity. Am I a Scot through over forty years of residency, or English through birth, or even German through the majority of my bloodline? And even that is questionable! Fürth is in Bavaria, so am I Bayerish, or perhaps a Franke as my family roots are more Franconian than Bavarian? I have been eligible to hold, as I do now, a British passport, but I understand that I could also have claimed German or even Israeli citizenship, although I never did! My faith journey has lurched from reluctant Anglican to Methodist, and Church of Scotland. At times in my life I have turned my back on organised religion – and
returned when I realised how much I missed it! Though I have now found a place where I feel I belong, I am also deeply aware of the many strands in my family background that have shaped me and brought me to this place.

**My Interfaith Story**

**Sister Isabel Smyth**

A large part of my personal spiritual pilgrimage has been the journey into the faith of others. It has been a sacred encounter and a pilgrimage which has truly enriched my soul. It began when I studied at Lancaster University. It was a series of coincidences that led me to that university and I was not to know when I started there what a life-changing experience it would be. Having been brought up as a catholic and having spent all my education within the catholic sector before becoming a catholic nun meant that my time in Lancaster was the first time in my life I lived and worked within a secular context. But it was an exciting and exhilarating context. Not only did I study world religions for the first time but I came into contact with devout people who practised these religions and for whom they seemed to be a source of inspiration, meaning and grace. This was a great challenge as I discovered that what I thought of as the truth was a faith perspective and only one faith perspective amongst others.

I also discovered that there were basic concepts which underlie all religions. These encounters were enough to make me wonder where my own faith had come from and what doctrines such as the Trinity and the Resurrection really meant. Although it was disturbing at the time I now look upon that time at Lancaster as the most graced moment of my life. It was a time when the scales fell from my eyes and my vision was widened to see God’s presence in other faiths. It was a moment which led me to reconsider my understanding of my own faith and to re-articulate it in terms that were meaningful to me. I was changed by that experience of Lancaster. I was disturbed in the security of my one-sided perspective. I came to realise the great diversity that there is in God and the search for God which is deep within all religions and indeed within all human hearts. I was able to recognise what was essential and what was peripheral in my faith as I came to rethink my understanding of God, religion and truth. Returning to Glasgow after Lancaster I knew I did not want to retire again into a closed community but wanted to keep alive my contact with other faiths and getting involved in inter faith relations has enabled me to do this.

One day I happened to see a poster for ‘A Presentation of Faiths’ organised from a place called the International Flat. I arranged to visit it and for the first time came into contact with that pioneer of interfaith relations in Scotland, Stella Reekie. I remember climbing the stairs to the first floor flat in Glasgow St and a tall, striking, graceful woman opening the door and holding out both her hands she drew me into the flat and said ‘you will be on my committee, won’t you?’ In a sense I have been on her committee ever since. Becoming a member of the Glasgow Sharing of Faiths provided me with opportunities for friendships with people of all faiths and our long standing friendship has meant supporting and encouraging one another in times of sadness as well as joy. It gave me the opportunity to visit and feel at home in different places of worship, to attend weddings and celebrations in faiths other than my own, to travel and experience what it is like to be Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist in countries where these religions are the majority and Christianity the minority. I have lived in ashrams and monasteries, made retreats with Buddhists, engaged in endless conversations, read the scriptures of others, taught world religions and conducted workshops on the faith of others, helped set up organisations like Interfaith Scotland, supported others like the Council of Christians and Jews, attended seminars and conferences, studied interfaith relations and continue to keep alive my interest and involvement in it, convinced that it’s vital for peace in our troubled world.

The reality is that interfaith relations has become the very atmosphere I breathe and I cannot imagine my life without it.

Written by **Sister Isabel Smyth** S.N.D OBE

With thanks to the Advisory Group  
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