



## UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE: REPORT OF VISIT BY INTERNATIONAL DELEGATES TO THE UNITED KINGDOM March 2024

A delegation of representatives of the worldwide interfaith organisation, the United Religions Initiative, visited the English Midlands and London on 1 - 4 March 2024 at the invitation of the United Religion Initiative UK ([uriuk.org](http://uriuk.org)).

The visit was primarily designed to introduce the delegation to the UK model of inter faith dialogue and faith-based social action, and to provide UK-based inter faith activists with helpful insights from abroad. One such insight was the Public Health Approach to Violence, a new approach towards isolating and disrupting patterns of violent behaviour, which has become well-respected in the USA since 2000. The conferences held during the visit served as an ideal forum to facilitate conversations about the Public Health Approach, particularly regarding religion-motivated violence (see Section 4).



*URI Delegation at Nishkam Centre, Birmingham*

The conference participants strongly encouraged URI UK to plant and cultivate the Public Health Approach in UK urban contexts, initially through pilot schemes in selected urban locations. This work will form the subject of applications to appropriate funders, who are invited to read the following report as part of their consideration.

### **1. Introduction – what is the United Religions Initiative?**

The United Religions Initiative ([uri.org](http://uri.org)) is a United Nations affiliate organisation founded in California in 1998 by retired Episcopalian Bishop William Swing as part of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations of the signing of the UN Charter. His purpose was to bring different faith groups together in fellowship and productive endeavour, thus mirroring the purposes of the UN in the religious sphere.

URI has become the world's largest interfaith network, with over 1,150 member grassroots groups ('Cooperation Circles') in 110 countries, divided into eight global regions.

These are actively engaged in areas including youth and women's empowerment, environmental protection, promoting freedom of religion and belief, and fostering multifaith cooperation to address social issues.

URI Europe is one of the URI's most active global regions, with more than 60 Cooperation Circles across 25 countries. Its secretariat is in Bonn, Germany.

United Religions Initiative UK (URI UK) is a registered charity and part of the URI Europe network. It pursues URI's global aims within the UK context: building bridges of cooperation among diverse religious and spiritual communities, fostering understanding and collaboration, helping to end religiously motivated violence, and creating cultures of peace, justice, and healing.



***Preeta Bansal, Chair, URI Global***



***Duncan Wielzen, President, URI Europe***



***Coronation event at Balaji Temple***

It was re-established in 2022 following some years in abeyance and currently links four UK-based Co-operation Circles. Its activities have included a youth conference on Freedom of Religion and Belief and a multi-faith celebration of the King's Coronation

It focuses as much on social action projects – bringing people together by doing positive work in communities – as on interfaith dialogue. It works with all who share its values, such as places of worship, youth groups and community activists, and it welcomes people from any background and of all faiths or none. It is based in the West Midlands.



## 2. The visit programme

Between 1st and 4th March 2024, members of the URI Europe board and secretariat (from Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain) visited the UK as guests of URI UK. A full list of delegates is at Annex B. Based at Coleshill in the West Midlands, they travelled to five religiously diverse inner-city districts over four days: Handsworth in Birmingham, Oldbury in the Black Country, the Golden Mile in Leicester, Swanswell Park in Coventry, and the London Borough of Barnet. They were accompanied by the Chair, Executive Director and Director of Global Programmes of URI Global, all based in the USA.

The ten delegates' visit to the UK came during significant global and local challenges to good relationships between people with differing religious adherence. The delegation brought fresh perspectives to help galvanise interfaith activity in the Midlands and London and learn about the UK model of interfaith dialogue and multifaith cooperation. URI UK, URI Europe, and private donations met the costs of the visit.

The visit included visits to places of worship (including observing acts of worship), a touring exhibition, shared meals, and conferences in the five host venues. The conferences addressed some complex themes: preventing religion-motivated violence, building cultures of peace and justice, the fragility of interfaith work, and promoting enduring, daily interfaith cooperation to address social issues.

They were designed to discover innovative ways for faith groups and other stakeholders to work effectively, inspire people to action, bring hope, and create opportunities and prosperity for local communities. They featured contributions from prominent interfaith activists, clergy of different faiths, a Member of Parliament, a Police and Crime Commissioner, academics, and local Councillors, followed by table discussions and a shared meal.



*Panel Speakers, Balaji Temple, Sandwell*

Audiences included those new to interfaith dialogue and more seasoned practitioners, and URI UK is grateful to its local partner bodies for attracting such a wide range of participants. URI UK hopes that UK interfaith initiatives will choose to become URI Cooperation Circles due to the visit, giving them access to resources and contacts worldwide. At the time of writing, two multi-faith groups had chosen to do so.

## Specific objectives of the visit programme:

- a) To introduce the international delegation to interfaith practice and issues in the UK and to provide forums for sharing their perspectives with UK practitioners.
- b) To explore the threats that presently face interfaith understanding, thereby advancing URI's purpose and action agenda; in doing so, to reach out to relevant partners and potential new Cooperation Circles.
- c) To promote the Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention (see section 4 below) and explore the possibility of a partnership to work on this issue in the UK.
- d) To offer the Board of URI Europe and URI Global senior management an opportunity to meet and plan future activities.
- e) To provide the delegation with quiet reflection and spiritual uplift opportunities.

A press release was issued at the start of the programme. This is reproduced in Annex A.



## 3. Summary of conferences

This section provides a summary of the five conferences. An opportunity for questions and table discussions followed each. Following the Cooperation Circle model, URI UK endeavoured to place at least seven delegates from at least three different faith backgrounds on each table.



There were pre-set topics for discussion, designed to encourage the tables to produce practical proposals for multi-faith cooperation that could be realised quickly and without significant resource outlay.

Points made in the table discussions are summarised in Annex C. (At the London event, the decision was taken to hold a group discussion following the presentations rather than table discussions.)



a. **Birmingham, 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024 (evening)**



**Location** Nishkam Centre, Soho Road, Birmingham

**Host** **Bhai Sahib Dr Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia**, Nishkam Centre Founder and President, URI UK Patron

**Chair** **Amrick Singh Ubhi**, Director of Public Affairs, Nishkam Centre

**Organisers** **Ajit Singh** and **Amrik Singh Bhabra**

**Theme** Ending religion motivated violence

**Speakers** **DCI Jennifer Pearson**, *Hate Crime Lead, West Midlands Police*  
Hate crime in Birmingham and what the Police are doing about it.  
**Preeta Bansal**, *Chair, URI Global*  
**Jerry White**, *Executive Director, URI Global*  
Introduction to URI and the Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention  
**Dr Duncan Wielzen**, *Chair, URI Europe*  
Humans and Peace Prize in Europe  
**Dr Josef Boehle**, Director, Peacebuilding Programmes, University of Birmingham  
Transforming the Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation into action.  
**Professor Jagbir Jhutti-Jahal**, Sikh Studies, University of Birmingham  
Role of Women in reducing religiously motivated violence

**Discussions facilitator** **Canon Dr Andrew Smith**, Department of Theology and Religion, Director of Interfaith Relations for the Bishop of Birmingham

**Number of participants** 60



**b. Sandwell, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2024 (afternoon)**



**Location** Shri Venkateswara (Balaji Temple), Oldbury  
**Host** **Dr Sinnathamby Kanagaratnam**, Chair, Balaji Temple  
**Chair & Organiser** **Shahin Akhtar**, Sandwell DCouncil, Convener, Sandwell Faith Sector Network  
**Theme** Creating cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings  
**Speakers** **Simon Foster**, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner  
How faith groups working together can make the Black Country safe and welcoming for all its residents  
**Preeta Bansal**, *Chair, URI Global*  
**Jerry White**, *Executive Director, URI Global*  
Introduction to URI and the Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention  
**Kardaya Rooprai**, West Midlands Faith Alliance  
**Ramesh Sharma QPM**, West Midlands Police  
**Discussions facilitator** Warwick Hawkins, URI UK Trustee  
**Number of participants** 35





c. **Leicester, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2024 (evening)**



**Location** Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre, Melton Road, Leicester  
**Host, Chair, Organiser** **Kirit Mistry**, Founder and Lead for Health Inequalities  
South Asian Health Action  
**Theme** The fragility of interfaith relations  
**Speakers** **Clr Manjula Sood**, Assistant Mayor, Community Cohesion Leicester City Council  
Uniting Leicester  
**Preeta Bansal**, *Chair, URI Global*  
**Jerry White**, *Executive Director, URI Global*  
Introduction to URI and the Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention  
**Fayyaz Suleman**, Chair, Leicester Council of Faiths  
**Keval Sachdev**, Chief Executive Officer  
Aikyam UK youth charity  
**Discussions facilitator** Warwick Hawkins, URI UK Trustee  
**Number of participants** 40



**d. Coventry, Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> March (afternoon)**



**Location** John Laing Centre, Coventry Cathedral  
**Host** The Very Revd John Witcombe, Dean of Coventry  
**Chair and organiser** **Dr Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor**, Professor, Sociology of Islam, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, URI UK Trustee  
**Theme** Promoting enduring, daily interfaith cooperation to address social issues  
**Speakers** **Zarah Sultana MP**  
How faith groups working together can help tackle the challenges facing society  
**Preeta Bansal**, *Chair, URI Global*  
**Jerry White**, *Executive Director, URI Global*  
Introduction to URI and the Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention  
**Manjit Kaur**, Co-Chair, Coventry Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education  
**Pru Porretta**, Godiva Sister and Chair, Coventry Multifaith Forum  
**Discussions facilitator** Warwick Hawkins, URI UK Trustee  
**Number of participants** 15





e. London, Monday 4<sup>th</sup> March (morning)



**Location** New North London Synagogue, East End Road, London Borough of Barnet  
**Host** Louise Froggett, Co-CEO, New North London Synagogue  
**Chair and organiser** Esmond Rosen, President, Barnet Multi Faith Forum  
**Theme** The UK inter-faith landscape, and ending religion motivated violence  
**Speakers** **Zarah Sultana MP** How faith groups working together can help tackle the challenges facing society  
**Councillor Nagus Narenthira**, Mayor of Barnet  
**Christina Spybey**, Trustee, Barnet Multi Faith Forum  
**Julie Siddiqui MBE**, Co-Founder, Nisa-Nashim – How interfaith work in the UK can be derailed by events abroad, and what can be done to shore it up  
**Dr Harriet Crabtree**, Inter Faith Network for the UK – UK interfaith landscape  
**Jeremy Simmons**, Faith Action – Faith Charter and faith based social action  
**Phil Champain**, Faith and Belief Forum – FBF youth programmes  
**Martin Weightman**, All Faiths Network – Freedom of Religion & Belief, UK  
**Ruth Peacock**, Religion Media Centre – media portrayals of religious issues  
**Preeta Bansal**, Chair, URI Global  
**Jerry White**, Executive Director, URI Global  
**Discussions facilitator** Introduction to URI and the Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention  
Warwick Hawkins, URI UK Trustee  
**Number of participants** 20



#### 4. The Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention

Addressing all five events, Jerry White, URI Global's Executive Director and a former joint winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for his campaigning work on landmines, introduced audiences to the concept of the Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention. He explained that violence should be seen not as an innate condition of specific individuals but as a pathological behaviour akin to a physical disease. Just as a contagion of disease is effectively tackled by outbreaks being contained and interrupted, so there are powerful techniques for containing, deflecting, and interrupting violence and stopping it from spreading – whether this be a violent crime, domestic violence, racist violence, or religion-motivated violence.

This approach, which has obtained widespread academic endorsement, has also gained favour among crime prevention policymakers in the United States in the last two decades. URI UK believes that it has clear applicability in the context of religion-motivated violence in UK contexts, whether this takes the form of Antisemitic incidents during pro-Palestinian protests in significant centres and on campuses or the Hindu-Muslim riots that were experienced in the previously well-integrated city of Leicester in 2021.

Therefore, URI UK took the opportunity of the five conferences to test audiences' reactions to the 'Health Approach'. This occurred in the table discussions and informal conversations over refreshments after the events. Reactions to the Approach were strongly positive, with many delegates feeling it should be tried in Britain. Some actively encouraged URI UK to help develop it further.

URI UK feels that this consultation method, whilst admittedly not rigorous in academic terms, provided a sufficient indication of support among interfaith activists to encourage us to develop proposals for a pilot scheme to test the impacts of the Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention in selected urban locations, likely to be in the Black Country. These will include online training in Health Approach techniques by an expert in the US and outreach/awareness-raising activities.



*Jerry White, Executive Director URI & URI Foundation*



## 5. Conclusion

URI UK believes that the visit programme, whilst perhaps intensive, amply met its objectives:

- UK interfaith activists and religious leaders gained fresh perspectives from our international visitors and had opportunities to forge new partnerships and generate new project ideas;
- Our visitors learned much about the UK interfaith scheme, nationally and locally, and gained an understanding of the challenges it has faced in recent years (and continues to face, with the regrettable closure of the Inter Faith Network for the UK);
- The Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention was explained to UK audiences for perhaps the first time, and there was much enthusiasm to see it rolled out in the UK context as appropriate.

Feedback from the international delegation was strongly positive, with comments including:

*“This visit to the UK was really inspiring. The people we met, their diversity and dedication to a better society, being more inclusive and working together in peace showed us a great willingness to have a vibrant and effective interfaith network. **Eric Roux, URI Global Council trustee for Europe.***

*“We are convinced that interfaith actors make a unique contribution to combating Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and all forms of group-based prejudice and hatred. We commend the great work of URI UK and all interfaith actors in the UK and offer our cooperation.” **Karimah Stauch, URI Europe Coordinator.***

*“Within a short span of several days, we were exposed to a variety of grassroots interfaith initiatives. And meeting with some high-profile interfaith leaders added so much of great value to our encounters.” **Duncan Wielzen, Chair, URI Europe.***

*“It was inspiring to engage with and to learn about the work of a broad variety of people doing meaningful interfaith work in the UK.” **Alice Swett, Director of Global Programmes, URI.***



## 6. Acknowledgements

The Trustees of URI UK wish to warmly thank the following individuals for their enthusiasm, commitment and good humour in helping us to arrange five conferences, with accompanying social activities and with many accommodation and travel challenges to overcome, in quick succession and at short notice:

Ajit Singh	Nishkam Centre, Birmingham
Amrik Singh Bhabra	Nishkam Centre, Birmingham
Shahin Akhtar	Sandwell Faith Sector Network
Kirit Mistry	South Asian Health Action, Leicester
Canon Mary Gregory	Coventry Cathedral
Esmond Rosen	Barnet Multi Faith Forum
Karimah Stauch	URI Europe Central Office
Angelina Vladikova	URI Europe Central Office
Paresh Solanki	Media
Deepak Naik MBE	Chair, URI UK
Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor	Trustee URI UK
Mandip Singh Sohal	Trustee URI UK
Warwick Hawkins MBE	Trustee, Lead Organiser & Report Writer





# United Religions Initiative



## PRESS RELEASE

28 February 2024

### **OBAMA ADVISER AND NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNER TO VISIT UK.**

Preeta Bansal, President Obama's former senior policy advisor, will visit the West Midlands, Leicester, and London between March 1 and 4.

Ms Bansal, an American social entrepreneur, is the Global Chair of the United Religions Initiative (URI), the world's largest interfaith organization. She will be accompanied by the executive director of URI, Jerry White, a campaigner, and humanitarian activist who shared in the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize for his work in banning landmines.

The two will be part of a delegation of URI activists from the United States and Europe coming to Britain at the invitation of URI UK, a charity headed by Deepak Naik MBE from Coventry.

The visit will include visits to places of worship, a touring exhibition and conferences in Birmingham, Sandwell, Leicester, Coventry, and London. These will address difficult themes such as preventing violence in all its forms and the fragility of interfaith work.

The conferences are designed to discover innovative ways for faith groups and other stakeholders to work effectively, inspiring people to action, bringing hope, and creating opportunities and prosperity for local communities.

Deepak Naik said, "Events in the Middle East and elsewhere are posing real challenges for good relations between faith groups here in Britain. On top of that, we learned of the tragic closure of the Inter Faith Network for the UK, which has done outstanding work in supporting dialogue for over 25 years. It is vital to strengthen interfaith activity in the UK and draw in new participants."

Preeta Bansal said, "Britain has always had a good reputation for interfaith dialogue, and my colleagues and I are keen to learn more. We also hope our experiences will provide fresh perspectives for activists here and give rise to new projects and approaches."

The conferences will feature keynote speeches from prominent interfaith activists, MPs, local councillors and panel discussions designed to produce practical projects and working partnerships.

URI UK hopes that UK interfaith initiatives will choose to become URI 'Cooperation Circles' because of the visit, giving them access to resources and contacts worldwide. Those wishing to attend a conference should email URI UK Trustee Warwick Hawkins MBE for details ([warwick@faithinsociety.org.uk](mailto:warwick@faithinsociety.org.uk)).

## **Note for Editor**

The URI is a global network with over 1,150 member grassroots groups (“Cooperation Circles”) in 110 countries. URI Europe has more than 60 Cooperation Circles across 25 countries. These are actively engaged in youth and women empowerment, environmental protection, promoting freedom of religion and belief, and fostering multifaith cooperation to address social issues. The visit to the UK comes at a time of significant global challenges. It intends to bring fresh perspectives to the UK interfaith landscape and enhance URI UK's mission of promoting enduring daily interfaith cooperation, ending religiously motivated violence, and creating peace, justice, and healing cultures. More information on URI is at [uri.org](http://uri.org).

URI UK is a registered charity that pursues URI's global aims within the UK context. Its objectives are:

- To build peace and understanding between people of different religions and cultures
- To focus as much on social action projects (bringing people together by doing positive work in our communities) as on dialogue – the two are complementary
- To work with all who share its values, such as places of worship, youth groups and community activists.
- To welcome people from any background and of all faiths or none.

**Since it was reconstituted in 2022, it has run three projects:**

- An event to coincide with the International Interministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion and Belief, where young people and community activists debated human rights and social justice and planned practical actions to safeguard FoRB.
- An event at the Balaji Hindu Temple in the West Midlands, where residents and people of all faiths came together to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III with music, good food, children's activities and the planting of trees.
- Participation in a vigil at Coventry Cathedral to express solidarity with the families of those killed during the Israel- Hamas conflict.

**For more information, please email [warwick@faithinsociety.org.uk](mailto:warwick@faithinsociety.org.uk).**





**URI Global Office****Preeta Bansal Global Council Chair**

Preeta Bansal served for more than 25 years in some of the most senior posts in the public and corporate sectors – from the White House to US diplomatic and human rights work to the top echelons of state government and global corporations and law firms. Preeta is a dedicated meditator, community volunteer, independent corporate director, investor, nonprofit leader, philanthropist, and MIT lecturer. She serves as Global Council Chair, Executive Committee Chair, Global Council Trustee (At-Large), and Senior Advisory Council Member.

**Jerry White, Executive Director of URI and URI Foundation**

Social Entrepreneur, Senior Ashoka Fellow, and humanitarian activist Jerry White further his peacebuilding journey by joining the United Religions Initiative as Executive Director. Jerry White is an author, diplomat, and humanitarian activist known for leading high-impact campaigns, three of which led to international treaties: the Landmine Ban Treaty, the Cluster Munitions Ban, and the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In 1984, White lost his lower right leg while hiking in an unmarked minefield in Israel. He worked closely with the late Diana, Princess of Wales, and shares the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize for the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

**Alice Swett, URI Director of Global Operations**

Alice Swett is the Director of Global Operations. She has been working at URI since 2016. She is a lifelong educator specialising in community engagement & leadership development. Before joining URI, Alice managed the City of Boulder, Colorado's Youth Opportunities Program/YOAB for 16 years.

To learn more about URI and Global office members, please visit [www.uri.org](http://www.uri.org), or scan QR Code.





## **URI Europe**

### **Duncan Wielzen, URI Europe President**

Duncan Wielzen is a pastoral worker in the R.C. Diocese Rotterdam (Netherlands). He has MA degrees in Theology, Religious Studies (Intercultural Ministry), and Educational Studies. He also has a Ph.D. in Theology from Catholic University Leuven (Belgium), and he works at the intersection of pastoral ministry and religious education.

### **Jaume de Marcos, URI Europe Vice President and URI Global Council Trustee**

Jaume de Marcos is a former President of AUDIR (UNESCO Association for Interreligious Dialogue), an NGO based in Barcelona (Spain), a founding URI member. He has a master's degree in history of religions and a Postgraduate degree in Religion and Human Rights.

### **Vjekoslav Saje, URI Europe Secretary**

Vjekoslav is involved in interfaith work since 1986 when he was living in Baghdad. From 1994 to 1996 he has been working for UN in Sarajevo. In 1997, together with CSIS, WCRP-World Conference on Religion and Peace and USIP-United States Institute for Peace, he has assisted in forming of Inter-Religious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### **Deepak Naik, URI Europe Board Member**

Deepak Naik MBE, FRSA, is honoured to be with URI from the time of its design, establishment and nurturing into a global inter-faith movement. In the UK and locally, Deepak is an activist for over 40 years, working mostly with young adults to co-create, organise, and delivery work that celebrate and honour the sacred, safeguard nature and help bring sense of fairness and hope to all.

### **Eric Roux, URI Global Council Trustee**

Eric Roux is currently the President of the European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom and the Vice-President of the European Office of the Church of Scientology for Public Affairs and Religious Freedom. He engaged in advocacy for religious freedom in the 2000s, and never stopped since.

### **Karimah K. Stauch, URI Europe Coordinator**

Karimah holds an MA degree in Economics from the University of Frankfurt/Main and an MA degree in Islamic Studies from the University of Bonn. Karimah works at the IT Department of Welthungerhilfe, a development NGO in Bonn. Since 2003 she is the European co-ordinator of the URI; she works with the URI Europe board and regional support team to support URI development in Europe.





**Angelina Vladikova, URI Europe CC Liaison Officer**

Angelina is an activist and peacebuilder from Bulgaria. She is Eastern Orthodox Christian with Master degree in Ecumenical Theology from Geneva University and Chateau de Bossey, Switzerland. She is a chair of BRIDGES – Eastern European Forum for Dialogue – an NGO for intercultural and interfaith dialogue in Bulgaria.

To learn more about URI Europe and Regional Support Team members, please visit [www.urieurope.org](http://www.urieurope.org), or scan QR Code.



## SUMMARY OF TABLE DISCUSSIONS

### BIRMINGHAM

#### Barriers to cooperation between faith groups

- Lack of understanding, prejudice between people of faith and general public
- Self-isolation of faith groups, lack of courage
- Government tone from the top
- Media – negative, sensational
- Poverty
- Lack of faith education leading to fear
- Poor understanding of religiously-motivated violence

#### General themes

- Listening is powerful – be respectful and open to others different to ourselves, making space for the other, celebrating difference, developing love to challenge fear
- Create safe, welcoming spaces for dialogue, including challenge
- Mindset shift through education – instil a common language of virtues/values, learning from faith as well as about faith; needs to start early to build spirituality, identity, security
- Restorative justice: listening to people who are hurting, recognising the impact of actions
- Keep things simple – a cup of tea, connection, understanding the power of networking
- Connecting with other generations: experience and innovation
- Health model – find solutions to underlying causes of religiously-motivated violence, e.g. ignorance, politics, cultural change
- Embrace the ‘solution focused’ model of religion

#### Practical ideas

- Address ignorance by visiting each other’s places of worship
- Make sure we are working with existing networks and resources
- Better, quicker use of social media channels to tackle hate speech
- Identify common causes and joint projects, building trust to implement effective action in the community
- Hold those with influence accountable (MPs, Councillors)
- Defend other faiths when attacked: stand united and supportive of other religions

### SANDWELL

#### Barriers to cooperation between faith groups

- Poor communication, ignorance, not knowing each other – lack of relationship and trust
- Judgmentalism, “I’m all right Jack”
- People grow up with myths divorced from reality
- Not enough people want to engage, or are too busy
- Central government ideology
- Youth identity is fixed early, leading to labelling of ‘the other’

## General themes

- Need to find common needs/causes, e.g. addressing antisocial behaviour, racism, crime, community safety, cost of living, mental health, homelessness
- Strengthen the idea of Equity
- Better religious education, including about interfaith
- Find role models
- Be curious and keep an open mind, more listening leads to more acceptance and understanding of each other's beliefs, culture and needs
- Debate should always be respectful, recognising that there is more than one story
- We have more in common than divides us

## Practical ideas

- Set up a Friends group or a Neighbourhood Watch
- Better use of Facebook and other social media to promote community cohesion
- Create safe spaces for open discussion of community issues
- Better promotion/advertising of religious festivals and community days
- Reach out to decision makers – a collective voice is stronger
- Reach out to smaller faith groups
- Raise general/business awareness of what faith groups contribute to the local area
- Make better use of existing groups e.g. West Midlands Faith Alliance
- Set up action groups or workshops to address specific issues in local areas
- "More of this" – create opportunities for informal conversations
- Shared pilgrimages
- Training for faith leaders in how to reach out to new migrant communities, e.g. through social media

## **LEICESTER**

### Barriers to cooperation between faith groups

- There is often an unhelpful element of competition between faith groups
- Conflict between faith groups abroad stirs up anger and resentment in Britain
- Among young people there is sometimes a gang mentality, seeking affirmation within their own group
- Misguided 'political correctness' in local authorities, leading to the banning of e.g. Christian nativity plays
- Parents can prohibit their children from visiting people/places of worship of different faiths
- Underlying factors such as deprivation and poverty can be articulated in religious ways
- People in positions of power using "divide and rule"
- Important public information does not reach ordinary community members

### General themes

- If we turn back to the genuine teachings of our faiths we will become more united
- People generally want to 'get on', including people without religious beliefs
- Just sitting with people of your own faith does not bring progress
- Parents should educate their children about the benefits of engagement between faith groups; it is important for children to meet/visit people of other faiths



- Schools should offer teaching on the value of interfaith: universal values, love, unity and respect
- Think for yourself, establish the facts, exercise diligence
- Cooperation between faith groups is critical and preventing/stopping civil unrest
- We should listen to the opinions of 12/13 year olds, and make early interventions to address prejudiced attitudes
- Community members should take ownership of their contribution to community tensions, and stop adding fuel to the fire
- There should be a concentrated effort to address misconceptions about faith among media and policy makers
- Interfaith groups should make sure that the voices of people from different backgrounds is heard, not just male religious leaders from the traditional faiths
- Recruitment to public roles/offices should be as diverse as possible, to provide strong role models
- 'Relatable' people should be the public face of different faiths
- Community relations efforts should find a way of integrating the LGBTQI+ community and refugees
- Need to have safe, non-judgmental spaces for difficult conversations

#### Practical ideas

- We should offer hospitality/meals to people of different faiths in our homes
- Small groups of different faiths could get together to compare scriptural verses, thus realising commonalities and broadening minds
- When a tense situation arises, community workers should lead face-to-face sessions between faith leaders in neutral venues, to address matters of concern
- Using personal connections, existing interfaith groups should incentivise new members to take part, focusing on high-risk groups – through formal invitations, VIP speakers, refreshments etc
- Young volunteers in places of worship should be asked to do rapid-response to hate speech on social media
- Places of worship could hold open weekends (Mosaic weekends) to raise awareness

### **COVENTRY and LONDON**

#### General themes

- Religious education should involve children, young people and adults (intergenerational) and should have a focus on peace
- Women are prominent in the field of combatting hate crime and religiously-motivated violence, their experience and expertise should be more widely shared
- Interfaith has been too cautious; in the present environment there should be "a muscular call to arms"

#### Practical ideas

- A 'Peace Picnic' to bring children of different faiths together
- Interfaith Youth Camps for teenagers
- Interfaith dialogue to be a part of visits by young people to twinned cities, could start online
- 'Rapid response' to hate speech on social media
- URI UK could host 'difficult conversations' workshops
- URI could run a competition for public/digital art on community relations themes