

Fife Interfaith Group

Summer 2011

- Identify needs of faith groups
- Advance public knowledge and understanding
- Foster mutual respect and coexistence
- Work together on common issues



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Where We Came From—What We Stand For

By Frank McFarlane

Fife Interfaith Group's origins can be traced to 2004 when three agencies came together with the shared vision of serving better the diverse communities within Fife.

The agencies concerned were FRAE Fife, Fife Council's Equality Forum and Fife Fire and Rescue Service. These partners identified that contact with an interfaith forum would greatly assist them to identify the needs of people of faith with regard to the services these and other agencies provided. However, they discovered to their surprise that, Fife, with a population of around 350,000 people, had no Inter faith group.

The three agencies contacted faith groups in Fife to sound out the possibility of setting up such a forum. In 2005 this aspiration became reality with the first meeting of the Fife Interfaith Group at Fife Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters in February, 2005.

Today the group has representatives from Islam, the Baha'i faith, Buddhism, Hinduism, the Methodist Church, the Church of Scotland, the Episcopalian Church, the United Reformed Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter –Day Saints and the Catholic Church.

How can people of very different faiths, some with histories of conflict, function as a group?

The first rule is that there is no proselytizing or preaching. It's fair to say, however, that members tend to be particularly strong in their own faiths; otherwise, having your core beliefs exposed continuously to competing religious perspectives might be a little unsettling!

In fact, one of the most enjoyable elements of the group's regular meetings is the session in which members discuss with each other their own faith perspective or tradition concerning some topic.



A driving force for Fife Interfaith Group is the realization that, by working together, all of its members and the wider community can benefit. A key objective of Fife Interfaith Group at this time is to advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Fife. This includes awareness of their distinctive features, respect for each others' faith, our common ground and the promotion of good relations between persons of different religious faiths.

And common ground is remarkably easy to find. We have found, for example, that the Christian obligation to 'love your neighbour as yourself' has an equivalent expression across all of the World's Great Faiths.

The personal links formed among members of Interfaith Groups such as ours have proved invaluable elsewhere in the event of attacks on places of worship or tension between different communities. The coming together of faiths also has an important symbolic importance: it is a visible sign of principled peaceful co existence and co operation among faiths within the Community of Fife.

PEACE GARDEN , BEVERIDGE PARK. KIRKCALDY



Everything was planned for the opening of the Peace Garden on the 4 December 2010. Plans had been put into place by Fife Council to revitalise a corner of the lovely Beveridge Park in Kirkcaldy where there were some trees which were to be replaced.



Originally the Interfaith Group had planned just to plant a tree but now it was to be a small garden with a paved area, surrounded by trees and in the centre a Peace Pole.



About 100,000 Peace Poles have been erected world-wide and can be made from any material and usually about 2 metres high. The pole is four-sided and on each side, in a different language, are the words "May peace prevail on earth".



The labour and engraving were generously donated by local tradesmen, and a lovely stone pillar was constructed . The four languages chosen were the four most widely spoken in Fife: English, Polish, Urdu and Arabic.



All funding was in place, seats had been purchased and the work on setting up the garden was to be started in early November. Plans for an information board, with quotations from all religions involved with the group, and acknowledgements to local companies was in hand and soon to be ordered. The work had



been generously donated by a construction company but on the day the work was to start the company concerned went into administration and everything was cancelled and it was back to trying to obtain additional funds.

It is now looking promising that the funds will be made available, just awaiting further information to be approved and then it could all happen at last—an answer to prayer.

Dates are not yet finalised and plans are still to be set out for the new date of opening the Peace Garden which can only be decided when the funding is finally approved.

These plans include staging a Peace ceremony which will involve local primary schoolchildren, a local choir singing, the quotations inscribed on the Peace Pole being read out in the four languages by members of the Interfaith Group, and religions performing items representative of their beliefs or ethnic origin.

Earlier this century the area where the garden will be situated was used by local ministers for outdoor services so it seems an appropriate spot to renew a spiritual focus.

Please watch this space and hear when this is all going to happen!

Interfaith Talks to Schools



By Frank Bowness

It was with much trepidation that I attended Balwearie High School at 8.45am for a week of talks in assemblies to each school year.

The reception from the head master and teachers was warm and of course that helped. I think that it helped, too, that the first talk was to the third year who are that little more grown up.

I had taken some information from the Scottish Interfaith website for Youth and told them my own background to fill things in.

The talk was stressing the things that every religion has in common namely "love your fellowman" and finished with a guideline about how to speak to other people about religion by not overreacting, not talking in terms that others can't understand and most of all to agree to differ.

A challenge was also issued to try to set up a school Interfaith Group, and leaflets were left for collection. The banner showing our logo was very useful as it gave symbols of other faiths and served as a good introduction.

It seemed to be well received. At least they listened and made me feel easier

about the rest of the week. Tuesday was the 4th year and very positive, Wednesday 2 talks were due first to the Fifth year and the second to the Sixth year who would hopefully be more likely to form an interfaith group.

Unfortunately as the talks had been rescheduled from December due to the snow the talk with the sixth form never happened as there was a man there from NHS giving a presentation about Organ Donation. He was all set up with computer and power point presentation and made me feel very old fashioned and inadequate with just a talk. However it went well and hopefully was enjoyed.

Thursday was First year and quite daunting to be confronted by 300 12 year olds, However they were very well behaved and listened quietly. The final talk was the second year and before my talk, reports were given out and I felt that perhaps they would not listen, but they did and again were very well behaved.

So how do I feel about the experience?

Well it was a chance to talk to nearly 1500 pupils about Interfaith principles. I have contacted the Scottish Interfaith Council, who will be supplying me with a power point presentation and I am willing to give it another go by contacting the other High Schools in Kirkcaldy and even perhaps in Fife. Of course if any-one else wants to try, that would be wonderful!





In partnership with Scottish Interfaith Council, Fife Interfaith Group hosted the most recent annual networking seminar in Kirkcaldy. The theme was "Sustaining Diversity: Working Together as people of faith to sustain our communities and the environment" There were displays by different faiths, and a variety of workshops on environmental issues.

[St Athernase Church, Leuchars](#)

[By Edwina Proudfoot Chairman and Project Director of Scottish Church Heritage Research](#)

The parish church of Leuchars is known as St Athernase – a dedication now thought to be a corruption of St Ethernan. The church sits on a low hill, surrounded by its graveyard and dates from 1183.

The outside is highly ornamented with arcades, carved with chevrons (zigzags) and other geometric designs, a style known as Romanesque. Not many churches of this date survive in Scotland, although fragments of similar carvings have been found in many churches throughout Scotland.

The view of the church from the east is amazing. The round east end (apse) with its arcades and plentiful decoration sit high above the viewer. Built on top of the apse is a seventeenth century octagonal tower, with a bellcote above, topped by a weather vane. Behind this early building the outline of the present nave can be seen.

The original nave was much smaller than the present building, and the change can be seen inside. From the entrance the view of the church is of a building full of light. The first thing the visitor notices is the tall arch, heavily carved, leading into the choir and thence into the apse. On the walls of the choir are several mason's marks, indicating which mason carved certain stones.



The main part of the church is typical of most churches; the pews face east and there is a gallery at the west end. An organ loft has been cleverly built on the north side of the church. One stained glass window at the south east was designed by William Wilson. On each side of the south door are medieval carved stones and set into the floor is a very early grave slab.

Before this church was built there was an earlier church, called St Bonoc's, situated to the west of the present building and beyond that was a long cist cemetery. These graves are of Pictish date; others have been found in Fife and elsewhere and indicate that Christianity reached the east coast by the seventh or eighth century.

*We invite and welcome men and women of all faiths to join our group.
The next meeting will be held at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day
Saints, Winifred Crescent, Kirkcaldy on Tuesday 23rd August at 6.30 pm.
Dr Junaïd Syed, Chairman*

For more copies of this newsletter or any further information

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