

Valleys Faith Forum

**Notes from Valleys Faith Forum exploratory meeting held at Glamorgan Business Centre,
University of Glamorgan, Treforest at 7.30pm on**

Thursday, 26th October 2006.

Meeting commenced 7.45pm and opened with Rev Vaughan Rees, Chaplain to the University of Glamorgan, welcoming everyone to the Valleys Faith Forum exploratory meeting and thanking people for attending.

Vaughan Rees introduced the work of the Chaplaincy and its current interfaith project. The initiation of the Valleys Faith Forum is part of this project.

He proposed an agenda for the meeting and this was accepted as the structure for the evening's proceedings.

Introductions

Those present at the meeting introduced themselves to the group.

- Vaughan Rees – University Chaplain
- Gareth Hughes – VALREC
- Gurwinda Singh – Sikh, working with VALREC
- Dr R S Randhawa – Sikh, and Cardiff Interfaith Project
- Hideyuki Yamamoto – Member of Race Equality Council
- Kamyar Solhjoo – Baha'i
- Phyl Gordon – Baha'i
- Chris Lenan – Christian
- Jan Harris – Christian, Castle Square URC Treforest
- Vidhjaah Manohara – Hindu
- Brigid Bowen – Interfaith Council for Wales Project Worker
- Rebecca Dyer – Christian, Chaplaincy Interfaith Associate
- Shereen Williams – Swansea Faith Forum
- Omer Williams – Swansea Faith Forum
- Sue Edwards – Buddhist
- Anthony Harries – Buddhist, Rokpa Cardiff
- Meena Solhjoo – Baha'i
- Beatrice Kent – Christian and member of Baha'i community
- Miranda Westlake – Christian, St Luke's Church, Rhydyfelin
- Ray Vincent – Christian, working with Chaplaincy

Shereen Williams from the Swansea Faith Forum provided a five minute presentation outlining the work and development of the forum in Swansea. She said that after the events of July 7th 2005, the Muslim community got together to plan an event against terrorism. On 8th August 2005 they approached the Bishop of Swansea, Bishop Anthony Pierce and welcomed his support. The group met every Monday prior to 9th September 2005 when they held a service for peace at Brangwyn Hall. Over 400 people from across the city and leaders from eight faith communities in the city attended the service. Due to the success of this service and the momentum of interest from the people involved, some decided to meet regularly to discuss matters of interfaith relations. The Swansea Faith Forum was officially inaugurated a year after the Peace Service and represents all the major world faiths, and also more informal spiritual groups. Each Faith Community has appointed its own representative to form the council. The Forum has also attracted people from all backgrounds and age ranges from 18 to 60. Each meeting is attended by 20-30 people.

SACRE – AGENDA ITEM NO. 7(C)

The activities of the Swansea Faith Forum are varied. They have been building a directory of organisations and faith links on the local authority's website. A meal was held to celebrate a year of success. Youth Groups are also involved with the Forum. Funding has been applied for to aid them in their work in the community.

Brigid Bowen then addressed the group and introduced herself as the Project Worker for the Interfaith Council for Wales. Her job is to encourage the formation of faith groups across Wales. She travels around Wales offering her support and the assistance of the Council to develop inter-faith dialogue in these areas. She is also helping towards the development of youth work which encourages dialogue regarding faith and the promotion of religious identity. Brigid mentioned the impending Interfaith Wales website and invited the Forum to use this website. Faith Forums are also emerging in Newport and North Wales.

Vaughan Rees thanked Brigid and Shereen for their presentations. The meeting was then invited to form three smaller discussion groups to discuss the following:

- 1) the purpose of the forum and
- 2) the function of the forum

Issues highlighted in these discussions can be found at the end of this document.

Ray Vincent (Honorary Chaplain) presented the results from the Chaplaincy's faith survey which related to what people hoped to achieve through a Valleys Faith Forum.

A shorter version of this survey was also available at the meeting.

The results from the survey were divided into two distinct categories:

- (1) Promotion of mutual understanding
- (2) Facilities

(1) Promotion of mutual understanding –

- a. Education – learning more about different faiths and living with diversity in our communities.
- b. Social – opportunities for meeting together as individuals and families
- c. Support – discovering practical ways in which we can support each other

(2) Facilities

- a. lack of local Mosque
- b. need for shops selling suitable food
- c. involvement of non-Christian faith communities in hospital chaplaincy and visiting

A list of suggested things the Forum could do together was offered:

- visiting local places of worship – each Faith Community extends an invitation to their place of worship
- show and tell – each Faith Community introduces an item or object to the Forum that is significant to their faith
- discussion on topical issues, sharing hopes and fears and overcoming isolation
- social evenings
- offering practical support to one another
- keeping ourselves informed about national issues

Vaughan Rees then suggested a possible way forward for the Forum

- A time of reflection and consultation – this time can be used for those who attended this first meeting to discuss the Forum with their Faith Community and reflect on the matters arising.
- Set a date for the next meeting – 7pm was suggested as a more convenient time in the evening. Thursday 30th November at 7pm was agreed. The provision of transport or car sharing for those travelling from Caerphilly or other outlying areas was recommended at the meeting. Vaughan Rees offered to investigate the possibility of providing a mini-bus and those who required transport from Caerphilly should let the Chaplaincy know well in advance of the meeting.
- It was suggested that the next meeting could appoint a representative working group to look at possible constitutions, declarations of purpose etc. The group would disband when that work was complete
- When agreement is reached on purpose and structure the Valleys Faith Forum could be formally inaugurated at a future meeting. The Valleys Faith Forum would then appoint a representative steering group in line with the agreed constitution.

This was procedure was agreed

Vaughan Rees closed the meeting with an invitation to centre ourselves in collective, contemplative silence.

VALLEYS FAITH FORUM
Discussion Group Feedback

Group 1

Purpose of Forum – what Forum should exist for

Meetings for all faiths to communicate together, to know each other and have understanding for each other. Some of the group members felt that it would be good to hear about what other faiths actually believe.

Although the geography and population of the valleys is different to that of Swansea the multi racial society is growing quickly.

Function of the Forum – ways in which it can achieve its purpose

The Tranquillity Zone in Caerphilly attracts people of all religions who befriend each other and meet in Caerphilly.

Multi cultural gatherings could be a good idea – music and food.

We started to talk about the need to encourage and include young people in the interfaith movement.

Group 2

Purpose of Forum – what Forum should exist for

Empowering people – religion isn't something to apologise for

Challenge people's perspectives of different faith communities.

Community cohesion – prevent imposed tensions.

Identifying core values of each faith community.

Educate ourselves and others about faith communities.

Function of the Forum – ways in which it can achieve its purpose

Taking the message into schools

Listening to readings from different faiths

Sharing Festivals – during each faith community's festival periods, inviting others from different faiths to join in the celebration.

Group 3

Purpose of Forum – what Forum should exist for

Integration

recognising that the majority get on well together

We are different flowers of one garden

We all have one God

Knowledge

Peace

Removal of troubles

Function of the Forum – ways in which it can achieve its purpose

Interfaith services