

# **SIFRE SAMPLINGS**

## **1991 - 2011**

**an anthology compiled by  
Cynthia and David Capey  
to celebrate SIFRE's 20th birthday**



## **PREFACE**

SIFRE is and has always been, first and foremost, a resource of people from many different backgrounds. There are longstanding members who have helped to make and shape SIFRE and there are new people joining the organisation who will contribute to its further development as SIFRE seeks to respond to an ever changing context. This compilation seeks to honour all these people and to highlight some of the events and experiences that we have shared during these past twenty years.

As Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource approaches its 20th birthday, it seems a good time to take stock - to review what has been achieved, to reflect on present circumstances and to look forward to the future. I hope this anthology will help us to do this.

*Sanjaya Martin Spettigue – SIFRE Chairman, March 2011*

My association with SIFRE goes back nearly 18 years. I attended the 1st SIFRE collection of Faith lectures during Lent in 1994. This re-awakened my faith and made me eager to learn more about other faiths from around the world.

For the last 9 years I have attended Mayoral Celebrations of Faiths in the Community at the New Wolsey Theatre, where many Faiths come together to celebrate and share their commonalities. My Mayoral Theme for 2010/2011 was "Caring for People". As in other years, I rejoiced about our shared values and love for one another, and it was a great celebration of singing, dancing, music and prayers.

I have been reading snippets from this book daily and I do hope you all will celebrate with me the 20th anniversary of SIFRE.

May SIFRE flourish for the next 20 years.

*Jane Chambers – Mayor of Ipswich 2010-2011*

Suffolk's diversity of faiths, across both rural and urban areas, is very much one of its strengths. Suffolk County Council (SCC) has a proud record of working in partnership with SIFRE to develop interfaith knowledge and resources in Suffolk. This has included joint delivery of key events such as Holocaust Memorial Days, training provision such as Lunchtime Faith Seminars at SCC, and SIFRE representatives taking a key and active role in, for example, the Community Cohesion and Inclusion Partnership Board. The relationship between SCC and SIFRE has been long and fruitful, and SIFRE is highly valued by the Council as it seeks not to speak on behalf of the faiths, but to help the faiths speak for themselves. The Council upholds the five key aims and values of SIFRE: Supporting, Informing, Facilitating, Resourcing and Educating.

*County Councillor Kathy Gosling,  
Portfolio Holder for Sport, Culture, Diversity, Health and Well-being.*





## ***INTRODUCTION***

The roots of SIFRE can be traced back to the outreach work of the Religious Studies Department of Suffolk College under the direction of Cynthia Capey, and also to the annual Celebrations of Community held by Ipswich Mayors since the early 1980s and hosted by Rev. Cliff Reed in the Unitarian Meeting House. Cliff was a founder member of SIFRE and is now its President.

In 1991, a county network of faiths was launched in the presence of the then Mayor, Councillor Ken Wilson. In 1994 it was formally constituted as a charitable company - Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource - with the following statement of purpose within its Memorandum of Association:

“The objects of the Company shall be to advance public knowledge and understanding of the teachings, beliefs, traditions and practices of the different religions and philosophies (including their distinctive features and common ground) of communities in Britain and in particular communities in Suffolk and East Anglia.”

In the early 1990s SIFRE produced two books (published by Suffolk College) to mark the centenary of the World Parliament of Religions. “Faiths in Focus in Ipswich and Suffolk” presented an orderly account from local leaders of their faith and of the life of their local community. “Finding our Way and Sharing our Stories” was written by women. It offered more personal perspectives and challenged the stereotyping which was inevitable in the other book. The compiling of these two books brought together people from the various faith communities and created relationships of trust.



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# AN OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUFFOLK INTER-FAITH RESOURCE

## Phase 1 - Roots

When the Religious Studies Department was created at Suffolk College it was able to benefit from the good relationships that were developing between people of minority faiths in Ipswich thanks to the work of Rev. Cliff Reed who had been building bridges with them and welcoming them into the Unitarian Meeting House for the annual Civic Celebrations of Community.

From the start, the Religious Studies programme at Suffolk College, alongside academic courses in Christian Theology, offered various short courses for the general public including: Judaism in Ipswich, Hinduism in Ipswich and Islam in Ipswich, presented by local members of those faiths. In addition, there were classes in Arabic and Qur'anic Studies for Muslims and others, taught by a lecturer brought over from the Islamic Academy in Cambridge. When Suffolk College later included Religious Studies in its degree programme, there were modules in world faiths, which in their turn strengthened the connections between academic studies and the life of the local community. So the ground was prepared for the formation of Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource.

SIFRE has always striven to be first and foremost a resource of people from different faiths, so our first task was to form and consolidate relationships with people from the many faith groups found in Ipswich and Suffolk. Friendships were formed through the writing of the two books - "Faiths in Focus in Ipswich and Suffolk" and "Finding our Way and Sharing our Stories". Individuals and groups were invited to join SIFRE, a diverse Board of Trustees met regularly and a small committee arranged events.

The Religious Studies Courses and SIFRE shared self-contained premises in a college annexe which had everything we needed – office, library, classroom, toilets, kitchen, car parking and even a garden landscaped through a donation from BT. People could drop in when they liked, we could stay open as late as we liked and we could also run events at the weekends. A real sense of community developed. Various people helped to run SIFRE in a voluntary capacity and we employed a part-time administrator.

## **Phase 2 - Outreach**

Coinciding with the National RE Festival in 1997, we made contact with the schools in Suffolk and offered a programme of visits and visiting speakers. We organised town centre trails to significant religious sites and places of worship in Ipswich. We began to build up a team of tutors from the faiths who were prepared to go into schools and explain their beliefs and practices. We produced basic booklets on Judaism, Islam and Sikhism to support our work in schools. We ran “World Religions Roundabout” courses for the WEA in many centres throughout Suffolk and we developed a Certificate of World Religions with the University of Essex. We accepted invitations to provide speakers for various voluntary organisations like Cruse and the Mothers’ Union. Our work with educational bodies expanded every year, calling for more and more resources. (Cynthia took early retirement and continued working full-time for SIFRE in an honorary capacity.)

## **Phase 3 - Engagement**

Our next phase brought us into greater engagement with health and social care services. We became regular providers of training for hospital staff on issues of faith and culture, and developed close working relationships with the Chaplaincy teams at Ipswich and West Suffolk Hospitals. We contributed to consultations on the needs of the elderly, and assisted Suffolk Carers in the development of appropriate services for members of minority groups.

Sadly, we lost our self-contained premises and were relocated via an office in Diocesan House to a prefabricated building in the College grounds next to the Chaplaincy. Although this move severely restricted our out of hours’ activities and we had much less space, we continued to run regular events for SIFRE members and others and were able to develop a close relationship with the College Chaplaincy team. Because we were on the College’s main site we became heavily involved with asylum seekers and much of our time and energy was directed to setting up a proper support system, which led to the founding in 1999 of the Suffolk Refugee Support Forum. In 1998 we produced the first edition of our “Inter-Faith Handbook for Community Use” building on Guidelines produced at St. Clements Hospital. We became closely involved in the development of the Multi-faith Chaplaincy at West Suffolk Hospital.

## **Phase 4 - Diversity**

There was more and more demand for our tutors and courses and also for our advice. Our work with statutory bodies became more and more significant and our game “Diversity” began to make an impact on them. We moved yet again, into a very pleasant (but almost impossible to find) classroom in the main college. As it did not include any secure office accommodation, most of SIFRE’s administrative work now had to be done from home where David Capey was by now also working full-time for SIFRE in an honorary capacity as executive officer. We responded to the challenge of regionalisation, by working with other inter-faith and faith groups in the region in order to set up the East of England Faiths Agency (EEFA) in 2001 (see EEFA history)

After the attack on the Twin Towers, the fear of terrorism activated people to take more interest in community relations and to consider the impact that faiths have on society. SIFRE began to work in partnership with the police and other agencies supporting the local community. “On Wings of Peace”, the commemoration which SIFRE organised for 11 September 2002, involved people of all ages and faiths and was attended by over 400, including representatives of the police, fire service, chamber of commerce and so on. Our “Inter-Faith Handbook” was by now in its third edition (2003) and much in demand.

## **Phase 5 - Partnerships**

Government guidelines on the promotion of social inclusion, the recognition of cultural differences, and the need to involve faith communities, set the public agenda and Diversity became a buzzword within the statutory bodies and the voluntary sector. We were now working with the County Council, the Police, the Ipswich Borough Council, the local hospitals, primary care trusts, community education, and voluntary organisations, including Suffolk Association of Voluntary Organisations, to promote this agenda. We were invited to join more partnerships and networks. Organisations as varied as Rotary in Ipswich, Probus in Lowestoft, Cub Scouts in Needham Market, the Anglican Cathedral in Bury St. Edmunds and Chaplains in prisons asked us for speakers from the faiths. In response to this demand we expanded our team of faith tutors.

We received some core funding from the County Council and were able to appoint an Assistant to the Faiths Officer. We were involved in a major conference with Suffolk County Council on Questions of Identity, Faith and Culture, and we worked with the County Racial Harassment Initiative on the innovative and challenging Faces of Suffolk Photographic Exhibition which toured the county.

## **Phase 6 - Consolidation**

This was a time of consolidation. A very supportive board of seven directors continued to oversee the legal, financial and training activities of SIFRE. Our Forum of Faiths was recognised as a valuable contact point and sounding board for the community, and we continued to provide an ongoing and interesting programme of events for our members and others in Ipswich and also in Bury St. Edmunds and Lowestoft, where we appointed honorary Faiths Officers to nurture SIFRE Circles.

We were increasingly involved with work in schools, with FE Colleges, the WEA and the Continuing Education Departments of Essex University and Cambridge University as well as with the statutory bodies, most of whom seem to be taking the government's diversity agenda very seriously, even if they were short of funds to support it! We had by now built up a team of about 50 tutors from the faiths and we were employing a part time Faiths Officer, 2 part-time Community Liaison Officers and an Admin Assistant. We were very happy and settled in the College Bungalow, once the home of the caretakers. People were able to drop in and various community groups met there and felt at home.

## **Phase 7 – All Change**

After being housed for many years by Suffolk College in various premises, culminating in the Caretaker's Bungalow, we moved house once again, this time to the upper floor of the Long St. Building, with the understanding that we would shortly become tenants of University Campus Suffolk, due to an impending exchange of land. This duly occurred and we settled in there for the foreseeable future. We were very grateful both to Suffolk New College and University Campus Suffolk for making such a generous arrangement with us.

Other changes also took place. Our Faiths Officer and Community Liaison Officers moved on to other posts and we replaced them with a Faiths Officer Team of volunteers. Under the government's community cohesion strategy and the creation of Local Strategic Partnerships, a parallel team of LSP Faith Officers came into existence which worked in close relationship with SIFRE and helped to raise the profile of the role of people of faith and faith communities throughout the county. This awareness was heightened by the presence of a SIFRE representative on the Strategic Board of the Suffolk Community Cohesion and Inclusion Partnership, and also on many other inter-agency partnerships and networks.

## **Phase 8 – Community Cohesion**

In 2009 we launched Abrahamic study groups in every district and borough council throughout Suffolk, attracting a large number of people in centres including Bealings, Beccles, Bentley, Bury, Ipswich, Mildenhall and Needham Market. The following year the study groups continued on the theme of East meets West in Suffolk, bringing representatives of the Dharmic faiths into the conversations.

The publication of the government's document "Face to Face and Side by Side", spelling out its policy for inter-faith work and the creation of a national inter-faith week, gave us another opportunity to promote our various activities and stress the importance of the "Heart to Heart" dimension which seemed to have been missing from the government's perspective.

## **Phase 9 – The Present Time**

In 2010 the core funding from the Suffolk County Council ceased and was replaced by a Service Level Agreement with EEFA on SIFRE's behalf. The programme funded by this arrangement was an ambitious one but it succeeded in delivering locality study groups, faith awareness/diversity training, faith and culture seminars, forums of faith, RE teachers' twilight sessions, HMD events and a very full agenda in the national Inter-Faith week 2010. With our partner agency EEFA we are engaged to deliver training and provide speakers around the region and beyond as set out in our Memorandum of Association. Nevertheless, our heart and our inspiration are in Suffolk – thank you, for the opportunities you have given us!

## VIEWS FROM THE EARLY YEARS

*In 1996 we were asked to contribute an article to the March edition of the international journal "World Faiths Encounter". The article was entitled "Places of Encounter" - Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource". The following extracts capture the spirit of SIFRE at that time.*

"Suffolk may not generally be perceived as a multi-faith county; nevertheless a closer study presents an interesting and surprisingly diverse picture, which may increase awareness of the complexity and richness of other communities. In Ipswich for over a decade the multi-faith, multi-cultural nature of the town has been recognised by successive mayors, who have sponsored an annual Celebration of Community.

During 1991-2, a local inter-faith network was formed which, by dint of major efforts over nine months, achieved charitable status by December 1994 as Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource. At the same time the Religious Studies programme at the Suffolk College was developing from a well-established programme of higher level and general courses into one which better reflected the pluralistic nature of society. Government funding in colleges does not, on the whole, provide for the nurturing of such endeavours and so it was vital to find a more flexible way of responding to the challenge.

In January 1995 a Religious Studies and Inter-Faith Centre was opened by the Suffolk College at its Bolton Lane Annexe in Ipswich. The work of the centre was to be the joint responsibility of the Religious Studies Section within the School of Humanities of the College and of the Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource (SIFRE). The centre aims to respond to the needs and interests of a wide range of people, by offering academic courses leading to degrees (through the college), and by developing a more informal programme (through SIFRE). The centre is easily accessible and its role as an information and advice bureau is developing rapidly.

SIFRE is a resource of people from different faiths working together to interact with the local community, to be innovative, to co-operate and to respond creatively to any opportunities that arise for the promotion of mutual understanding. SIFRE endeavours to achieve mutual understanding by involving as many people as it can in its activities. Tutors from SIFRE visit schools and organisations to speak about Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Sikhism. Speakers on other faiths are also available and contribute to the training sessions which SIFRE provides for people working in the community. Two books have recently been compiled as a result of this inter-faith enterprise, providing a fascinating insight into contemporary religious perspectives and practices.

### **Faiths in Focus in Ipswich and Suffolk (revised edition)**

This is a collection of 40 articles, written by members of religious and cultural groups in the Ipswich area. They introduce themselves, explain their beliefs and values, their practices and customs.

### **Finding our Way and Sharing our Stories: Women of the Nineties Reflect on their Traditions**

This is a rainbow of stories by women from different backgrounds reflecting on their lives in the light of their particular faith. The keynotes of the collection are loving tolerance and acceptance. The stories are thoughtful, revealing, intimate and at times very moving. The books have been published by Suffolk College Publishing (SETS Ltd) on behalf of SIFRE.

The representatives of the various faiths with whom we work are obviously those who already have sympathy for inter-faith processes. But we are finding that more and more people are being drawn in through our network of contacts, especially by the writing of the books. In the second edition of Faiths in Focus we were able to include articles from additional groups. On the whole our enterprise has been well received but there is some distrust from members of churches. On the other hand we have found it relatively easy to explain ourselves to people outside the churches. We hope that by offering a wide range of activities, including workshops in Hebrew, New Testament Greek, and ecclesiastical Latin, a series of lectures in Christian Theology as well as lectures in minority Christian groups and Humanism and other faiths we shall slowly reassure people that an inter-faith process actually provides opportunities for people to deepen their understanding of their own faith as well as begin to understand the traditions of others.

### **Reflections of a member of the Council of SIFRE**

*The following sections on pages 16-23 were also included in the article in World Faiths Encounter:*

“In 1989 I became the Humanist member of Suffolk County Council’s Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education, which includes several different Christians and Dr Sushil Soni, a Hindu, who is now also a member of SIFRE. We have worked together on religious education and worship in schools. I was therefore delighted to join SIFRE, and have found that it more than fulfils my expectations as a vehicle for mutual understanding. As a Humanist I have three main interests in inter-faith dialogue.

My first interest is in promoting the credibility of Humanism as a respected choice people can make in life: a vibrant morality without transcendental beliefs or supernatural assistance. I feel there is no merit in someone struggling to cling to a belief if they are racked with doubt about its factual or ethical worth. Rather, as a Humanist, I embrace and celebrate doubt about all matters scientific and about detailed rules for living. At the same time I cling strongly to basic principles such as honesty and consideration for people's feelings.

My second interest is my curiosity about what the beliefs and practices of other cultures are, and how they might contribute to the search for better ways of living. It gives me a lot of pleasure when I see people who are both sincere in their particular kind of worship or other cultural practices, and when I see how these help people to stay afloat in the rough seas of life.

My third interest is to explore (gingerly) how people who are committed to beliefs cope with probing questions as to how they justify beliefs factually and ethically.

I have to be careful not to offend people, and if there is a gulf of mutual incomprehension I normally withdraw. However I do try to tactfully stimulate people to question their assumptions about two areas (a) how do they know their revelation is true and others are not (b) are their beliefs truly moral at all?

Naturally I also try to examine my own tradition critically, and I have found Chief Rabbi Sacks six 1990 Reith Lectures very useful as an intelligent and knowledgeable critique of Humanism.

*John Aldam*

### **Reflections of.....an Associate Tutor of SIFRE**

I see SIFRE, I see Cynthia - my view merges one with the other. It's mainly due to her persistence that SIFRE has taken off as well as it has. Her gentle but firm persuasion has led me to be involved in quite a few of the many activities that have emerged from SIFRE's teams of committee members and volunteers.

Workshops for RE teachers to my mind is one of the most fundamental projects that is going on through each academic year. My participation has been in terms of passing on to teachers, who often already have a vast knowledge and appreciation of the philosophy and principles of Hinduism, a deeper understanding of the culture, traditions and customs associated with it.

Feedback from a group of Cambridge ordinands proved that seminars arranged for them over three days last January were indeed invaluable. The coming together of the different faith communities to inform the student clergy was, in

my view, quite an educational experience for both organisers and participants. Frank talking by Muslims from varied backgrounds illustrating cultural differences, an impressive tour of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the generous hospitality received at the Sikh Gurdwara, and the inter-faith Bible study of the sacrifice of Isaac were all memorable. Another group will be coming early in 1996.

The beauty of belonging to SIFRE and being part of its structure is the social interaction that one is essentially made aware of. Social gatherings are a positive tool used in the machinery of the workings and functions of the organisation itself. Various people willingly hover together, preparing tasty selections of cross-community delicacies for any occasions that may arise - all this being part of SIFRE's programme of promoting interchange between different groups.

One such package was put together for East Suffolk Mind who were concerned that the ethnic minorities hardly ever use their services. The task of discussing this and of preparing them for possible changes in their clientele was shared between a group of tutors. It was interesting to note that some of the participants had never before been directly involved with ethnic minorities. I enjoyed sharing with them some of the Hindu background of culture and customs that they might need to know.

An event to which I am looking forward is the Lent Lecture series with its title "Weep not for me, weep for yourselves and your children". I have been asked to participate and it will be a different kind of experience from those with which I have been involved so far with SIFRE. A closer theological aspect linked with personal ingredients will give a wider outlook on this statement of Jesus Christ on his way to the cross.

I come from a traditional Hindu family, was brought up in a predominantly Muslim country, was educated by catholic nuns from Ireland, and I am now married to a Sikh and I can confidently say that I have had the best from all these religions.

The writing of "Finding our Way and Sharing our Stories", to which I contributed, has opened up avenues of friendship and integration on a personal basis. However, SIFRE is still only a baby, being nurtured and groomed, for scores of people to walk through its doors, and gain a lifetime of knowledge and experience

*Renuka Sually*

## **A Course in the Life of.....Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource**

“Weep not for me, weep for yourselves and your children.”

These words from Luke’s Gospel spoken by Jesus on his way to the cross express movingly the theme of this year’s public Lent course. In the Gospel story Jesus is addressing the women of Jerusalem who are distressed by his suffering, and warning them of the sorrows that lie ahead for them and their families.

In this Lent Course a number of women will be talking about the kind of suffering that they, and in some cases their children, have experienced. They may be telling of situations of pain that people do not usually speak of in public, especially in a religious context: suicide, handicap, rape, miscarriage and the death of a child will be among the topics discussed.

For some of the speakers, an awareness of walking the path that Jesus trod has been a source of strength, and Christians will reflect on how they see their experiences in the light of the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

Speakers from other faiths will share how they have coped with pain, and how it is understood within their tradition. The themes for the sessions are taken from incidents in the week before Jesus died.

Tuesday 27 February: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Tues. 5 March: But he denied it, saying, I do not know what you mean.

Tuesday 12 March: Let this cup pass from me..

Tuesday 19 March: What is it that these men testify against you?

Tuesday 26 March: At the foot of the cross.

The speakers will relate their experiences to these moments - experiences of feeling rejected, of experiencing denial, of being accused by others; and it is hoped that members of the audience will also bring their insights to this inter-faith exploration of suffering.

## **Extracts from “Finding our Way and Sharing our Stories”**

### **An extract from Sikhism, Love, Amrit**

My personal ritual was to burn small candles, you know the ones you get six in a box, in front of a metal Khanda (Spiritual symbol of Sikhs) in the hazy start of a day, Amritvela. In the gloomy winter mornings I love burning candles and incense sticks as much as I can, for surely a lightbulb doesn't have the same charm! But this time instead of burning the candles in front of the Khanda, I burned them behind the Khanda. I thought nothing of it.

Now you may think me simple. But aren't the most wondrous things in life simple? Shouldn't our devotion to Waheguru be simple, not stupid, but simple? Yes, an intelligent yet simple love. Well something simple struck me. The Khanda was no longer its bright metallic colour. When the candles burned behind it, the Khanda was blazingly dark.

I was amazed. I'd always thought, as I festered in my emotional pothole, that if the Khanda was Light and Waheguru was light, it was light years away from me. Now I could see that God (Waheguru) was not just Lightness but Pitch Darkness too. I wasn't alone, I had the Dark, Dark strength of God around me. God is everywhere.

*Simarjit Sandhu, Suffolk College Assistant Librarian*

*(The full version of Simarjit's story, as published in "Finding our Way and Sharing our Stories", was included in a Resource Book for the Open University.)*

### **Extract from The Goddess Within**

Financially you will not find many rich Pagans, for wealth and material possessions aren't as important to them as self fulfilment and care of the planet. Pagans are aware that money is needed but only to exist on a mundane level. There aren't many rich Pagans but most of them are happy.

From all that I have written you may think that Paganism is an easy path to tread, but it isn't. There is much prejudice and misguided fear against us for our beliefs. Our religion dates back to pre-Christian times, but we are tolerant of other religions, which we believe are seeking the same truths in different ways and with different names. We are not Devil worshippers, for we do not believe in the devil, so how can we worship him? We believe that there is a negative and positive side to all creation, and you need both to exist.

It is very hard work to be a Pagan and witch. It involves a great deal of self discipline, study and deep self analysis, and therefore will not suit everyone. We therefore do not seek converts. You must be aware of and control the negative side of your nature and channel it and use it for good, and to enhance and develop the positive. It has been for me an experience that has helped me be aware of ME, and to love myself as well as others. It has enhanced my self expression and encouraged me to take up crafts I hadn't attempted for many years like art and music.

My faith has taught me to value each stage of my life, for I will soon be classed as the crone when my first grandchild arrives. I look forward to a time of cherishing and teaching, of love and laughter, and walks in the countryside, passing on my knowledge and love of nature. So the circle turns and comes back to the baby birds hatching in their nest

*Sue Smith-Jennings*

### **Extract from My Christian Journey**

On my Christian journey I have experienced a recreative power that can redeem situations that seem hopeless. I have received from other people encouragement, forgiveness, commitment and love. I have been given an example of steadfastness and courage that has summoned me to take great risks and to keep going on. I have been challenged by my studies, in my work, in my friendships and by my family to be open, to travel hopefully and to appreciate the gifts and insights that others have to offer. I can affirm what I perceive and have experienced to be at the heart of Christianity. I believe that it reflects what exists at the heart of the world itself. I recognise my Christian journey as a truly human journey. I am learning to recognise and greet my fellow travellers, who have set out from different places, and who are still, like me, finding their way – home?

*Cynthia Capey*

**A Letter from the Heart of - Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource**  
**FROM EAST TO WEST**

Dear "West"

This is a letter to you from my heart. I left my beloved Persia in the East to educate myself in your land. I left behind the people and the land I cared for so much. I discarded carelessly the love that I valued so much.

Arrived in the West, I was taken aback by the lights, musics, daring of you. Modesty seemed not to be valued so much; individualism seemed so highly in value; materialism seemed thought of a great deal; care and respect for the elderly did not seem a matter of must. Youth, rebellion, depression, and generation gap was the talk of the day.

The young were daring, strong at face value, compared to me - naive, innocent character. Do I fit in? The fear of change shook me.

Dear "West", I tried my best to fit in as much as I could. But there were things that I could not change. I came to realise the best way was to be myself; not change but adapt things to my framework of the Islamic values of life; to appreciate being different; to live at peace within myself; to be truthful and honest to myself; to make no attempt to be who I cannot be.

In this way life got easier. I was who I was. I was not going to change for any other values but cherish those that I was brought up to.

As time went by, I came to "unfold" you, to know you, dear "West" deeper; to discover the love, the gentleness and kindness that lay in your heart. I discovered my values within you too: values for humanity, welfare issues, the struggle against injustice, and social ethics, embedded in the heart of many individuals. This touched my heart.

I learnt that I was right not to change for what the eyes met, but, by being myself, found what the heart felt - the treasures that lie deeply within you.

with my sincere love

from "East".

*Elahe Mojdehi*

## **A Muslim Mother in Britain**

Being a mother to my  
three teenage daughters  
was no problem,  
was no problem to me,  
neither was there any  
difficulty with the Creator  
Who wanted it thus  
to be.

Being a mother, a  
Muslim mother  
with three grown-up  
girls to be,  
created havoc  
with all the others  
all the well-wishers  
for me.

They resented and they shrank away  
as far away as could be,  
that, I did allow  
my young daughters  
to walk on their own --  
on their own completely.

Yes, I did say  
to my innocent daughters  
that, you would  
never be alone  
on your own,  
Allah the Guardian  
would surely be  
with you  
forever and ever and ever  
wherever  
you be.

*Shams Zaman*

## SUFFOLK INTER-FAITH RESOURCE

### Suffolk College Annual Equal Opportunities Report 1995 - 1996

Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource (SIFRE) works in partnership with the College from a base in Bolton Lane Annexe, shared with the Religious Studies department. It thus provides an inter-faith context for all the Religious Studies classes.

SIFRE is committed to working with people of all faiths in Suffolk and has built up a membership representing over 30 different groups, including Baha'is, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Humanists, Jews, Muslims, Pagans and Sikhs.

It has a team of tutors and consultants who have been invited to work with various groups - nurses, junior doctors, ordinands, East Suffolk Mind, Ipswich Hospice, Suffolk schools. It has provided speakers for voluntary organisations.

In November 1995 SIFRE published through SETS Ltd. 2 books, *Faiths in Focus* (2nd ed.) and *Finding Our Way*, which highlight the diversity of Suffolk through informative and fascinating articles by local people about their beliefs and practices.

SIFRE has achieved national recognition; it was invited to write a 5000 word article on its work for the journal *World Faiths Encounter*, which was published in the March 1996 edition.

The Religious Studies and Inter-Faith Centre is developing a role as an advice and resource centre. It provides open access and a welcoming environment for casual enquirers and its services are frequently sought as a specialist agency. Ipswich Hospital and other establishments have turned to us for translations of leaflets and for updating of their information. Students and schoolchildren call on us for help.

An Inter-Faith Women's Group has been formed which meets monthly and there have been consultations for youth - with the police; and on Europe, in conjunction with the Pakenham Academy. A day's outing was arranged in the summer for local people to visit the Neasden Hindu Temple and the Hare Krishna Centre in Letchworth Heath.

Through its local links SIFRE is able to facilitate the integration of students from ethnic minorities into the College; it has invited local primary schools to put up displays in the College foyer on a termly basis celebrating major religious festivals; SIFRE has run a weekly programme of open lectures; it has provided a base for Muslim students to meet regularly and has involved them in its activities; it has supported the multi-faith development of the College Chaplaincy.

SIFRE has sought to involve the various sections of the College in its enterprises - furniture students made the stand for the Suffolk Book of Remembrance for

those who have died of Aids which is housed in the Inter-Faith Centre; Carousel Students made the garden furniture and helped plant the Sri Chinmoy Peace garden which is outside the Centre; catering students have prepared food for some of the celebrations. From time to time lecturers have asked for information, or for input into classes. However, on the whole College staff have not taken up the opportunities which SIFRE provides.....

*.....but they did in subsequent years!*

*Cynthia Capey, December 1996*

## **The Civic Celebration of Community**

When SIFRE came into being in 1991, much groundwork in inter-faith relations and co-operation had already been done. An important aspect of this was the Civic Celebration of Community, an event already held annually since 1980 at the instigation of successive mayors of Ipswich. Essentially it is about being good neighbours across religious boundaries, as citizens of Ipswich and fellow members of the one human race - in the spirit, from my own Christian point of view, of Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan.

The initiative for the first Celebration came from the then Mayor of Ipswich, Cllr. Eric Grant, a Christian in the Anglican tradition. Eric was active in what is now ISCRE, as I was, and it was in that setting that the idea was raised. Several other religious leaders who were involved in that necessarily secular organisation also endorsed the proposal. The idea was to recognise, in a positive way, that Ipswich is now home to people from a variety of religious traditions – people for whom religion is integral to their lives and cultural identity. It was seen that the cultivation of good relations and greater understanding between faith communities is not only essential for social cohesion but also something to be celebrated. The conversations we held and the relationships we forged, in planning the first and subsequent Celebrations laid an invaluable foundation for the development of good inter-faith relations in Ipswich, and helped pave the way for SIFRE.

As successive mayors of Ipswich included the Civic Celebration of Community in the calendar for their year of office, it soon came to be regarded as an annual event. My own Unitarian congregation was more than happy to host the Celebration at our Meeting House in the early years, after which it was held in several town-centre churches of various denominations. It should be said, perhaps, that Christian churches were the only religious buildings used because no other faith community had premises large enough. More recently the Celebration moved to the 'neutral' venue of the New Wolsey Theatre.

The term 'Celebration' to describe the event was carefully and deliberately chosen. It is not and has never been called a 'service' and neither has it ever been described as 'multi-faith worship'. It has always been recognised that each religious tradition is distinct, whatever they may or may not have in common on some things. Similarly, it has always been recognised that any 'blurring of the boundaries' is likely to be unacceptable to the members of one or more faith communities. In the Celebration each religious tradition has always had its own discrete slot, in which to share with everyone else something of their own faith's practice, traditions, and perspective on a previously agreed theme.

It has been a guiding principle of the Celebration that no one be asked or expected to say or do anything that is against their conscience. In the same spirit, while witnessing to their own beliefs, participants do not use the occasion to proselytise or to attack or belittle the beliefs of others. Those items in the programme in which all present are *invited* to take part are not specific to any faith but, rather, focus on the themes of shared community and common humanity in a local context. I hope that this fine Ipswich tradition, while adapting to change will long continue.

*Cliff Reed (CMR 14 July 2011)*

# OUTREACH

## On Becoming a Jewish Tutor for SIFRE

An unexpected telephone call in the late summer of 1997 was the beginning of it all! I had very little idea of what SIFRE was about, but I agreed to go along to take some classes of 5-8 year olds who were taking part in a week of learning about the different branches of Christianity and other religions in Ipswich. I was to talk to the children about Judaism (obviously, I am Jewish) as there is no synagogue in Ipswich for them to visit.

And, almost before I knew it, I had become a Jewish Tutor for SIFRE - and this opened up to me a "later life" career which in variety, interest and pleasure has far exceeded anything I've ever done before.

I am invited into primary and secondary schools, adult evening classes, to Church discussion groups, and even to Ipswich Hospital to tell nurses studying to work in operating theatres and with post-operative patients what to do if one of them is Jewish! The age range of my "pupils" is, amazingly, between 5 and 80+ - but not all at the same time, I'm happy to say.

Obviously my talk differs in each instance - often schools ask me to concentrate on a particular Jewish festival or on something that links in with what the pupils are currently studying - but basically I tell my audience about Jewish people and their religious practices and, where appropriate, something of their history.

The one time when my talk had to change dramatically was when I was invited to speak to about 30 children in a Special School - the children were aged between 7 and 14 but, as their teacher told me in advance, they all were mentally aged 7. It is very difficult to talk about God (albeit in the simplest terms whilst lighting candles) when you are wondering why He made these children so malformed either mentally or physically. I don't know what they got from the class - but I know the humility and sadness and gratitude that I got from it and the admiration for their teachers.

On a happier note, I was taking a class of 5 to 7 year olds and I was talking about the Sabbath and saying that the meal Jewish people eat after they have blessed the candles and the wine and the bread is the best meal of the week, and I had guided them into choosing roast chicken and a suitable pudding (in line with the explained dietary laws) when one little blonde moppet put up her hand and lisped, "I'd prefer Pot Noodles"!

As I said at the beginning, the variety and interest and pleasure are immense and I only hope that these transmit to the children and adults to whom I give talks.

*June Bell, Jewish Tutor (June has since died)*

## **Chelsea Flower Show – A Spiritual Experience**

In May 1997 a few of the women (Muslim, Sikh, Christian) from Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource made our way to Chelsea Flower Show. Our visit to the gardens of Chelsea with friends from different ways of life and faiths, was a reminder of togetherness, friendship and oneness. Our long journey enhanced our share of thoughts and memories.

Once at Chelsea, among the crowds of many hundreds, for some while I got separated from my friends. I did not get in a panic! This gave me a chance to see myself thus alone but somehow part of all. It gave me moments to sit down and contemplate.

It felt we were all on a pilgrimage to give homage to beauty. The enthusiasm, joy and quest for beauty was vibrant. The search for perfection, colours and freshness was breathtaking. My thoughts took me to one of the verses from the Qur'an that says: "We show them our signs till it be manifest unto them that it is the truth". (41:53)

I felt that if we only look truly by heart at these gardens we'll see the signs of God everywhere through the beauty of flowers and enthusiasm for their quest. They were all there submitting to God's creative power. They all tell us something about God's activity within creation. This reminded me of another verse of the Qur'an: "Have you not seen how whatsoever is in the heaven and the earth glorifies God?" (24:41)

My heart was filled with the joy of remembering yet again another verse of the Qur'an that says: "Wherever you turn, there is the face of God". (2:115)

I felt the warmth of tears in my eyes, how wonderful is the joy of closeness to Allah. I felt the natural human response to God who is conceived in these terms, is to feel close to him and love him.

After a while I continued my walk to the Garden of Provence, my favourite garden at Chelsea. Passing through the huge crowd who all like me seemed fascinated by this garden, I eventually managed to find a space in front. I stood there for quite a while; stood, looked and wondered.

At these moments while my eyes were soaked with the reflection of natural beauty of this particular garden, I felt so blessed by Allah touching my heart once more by reminding me of the wisdom of the Qur'an. I remembered some verses of the Qur'an that conveyed the message that earth represents the place where heaven displays its properties and displays the signs of God. The display of peace and serenity in this particular garden said it all "display of nature in harmony".

A simple rustic archway in the high surrounding wall led to a small lavender field; a blend of stone, foliage, flowers, pomegranate tree and sound of water all echoed a reflection of paradise, or as I say it in Persian, my mother tongue, "Paradisa", the heavenly garden.

No wonder why this beautiful word has found its way into English language. This is a Paradise indeed, I thought.

It only takes a few hard-hearted human beings not to be moved by a garden full of beautiful flowers, trees and splashing fountains. It felt that the earth only expanded to let heaven into its midst.

The huge crowd around this the most natural garden of Chelsea was the sign of the people's strive for simplicity and natural beauty. In the Moslem view beauty is God's attribute; the prophet of Islam, Mohammed (Peace be upon him), said "Allah is beautiful and loves beauty". This took me to the thought that we are all from God, even the ones who deny God; their nature, unknowingly, leads them to the quest and admiration of beauty. This is what links us to our spiritual nature, makes us to search for our link to our origin which is from the beautiful Allah.

Eventually, with all these packages of thought, I find my way to my friends. We all enjoyed our visit and surely we all collected our own individual thoughts and experiences which we will cherish for ever.

*Elahe Mojdeh*

## **A Lucky Break**

In the spring of 1998 a SIFRE group went on a study tour to Israel. Shocked at the blinkered outlook of people we met, whether inhabitants, tourists or pilgrims, we decided to create a board game which would challenge players to grapple with their own backgrounds and agendas while taking on board the context in which they found themselves.

Towards the end of the tour we visited Jericho, within Palestinian territory. At the foot of the Mountain of Temptations, I slipped and broke my ankle. After emergency treatment in Jericho and Jerusalem I eventually reached Ipswich hospital where confined to bed for several weeks and in plaster for 19 weeks I started work on the proposed game with help and encouragement from SIFRE colleagues.

My hospital experience highlighted more problems. Here too people's backgrounds were not taken into account and their needs were not dealt with holistically. The religious and cultural traditions of staff and patients were not considered and even their basic human needs were often ignored. Wards were not properly cleaned; water was not provided for washing after a bed-pan was used; appropriate diets were not provided; patients were left for hours unattended. People working in hospitals needed to consider what kind of medical and personal treatment should be provided in the full light of a person's identity.

There was an enthusiastic response to the idea of developing a training game to address these issues. The scope was enlarged to cover all aspects of life, and to provide an opportunity for everybody to become sensitised to, and equipped for, the challenges of living and working in our increasingly multi-faith and multi-cultural society. First produced "in-house", and trialled among SIFRE members, Ipswich Borough Council and Suffolk County Council, the prototype game soon made its way into the public domain and was renamed "Diversity" by a social worker friend of mine. It has made a great impact on us, on our customers and on the community at large.

*Cynthia Capey*

## **ENGAGEMENT: - COURSES AND MORE COURSES....**

*SIFRE has been booked on many occasions to deliver a variety of faith awareness training courses to social workers and to nurses and care assistants at Ipswich Hospital, St. Clement's Hospital and West Suffolk Hospital. Here is an example of one which focussed on mental health issues.*

### **Focus on Faiths**

East Suffolk Health Service Trust, Staff Training Day with SIFRE tutors from various faiths at St Clements Hospital on Wednesday 14 October 1998. The programme for the day is flexible and can be adapted to the group's needs.

9.30am	Welcome and General Introductions Outward appearances - names, dress, greetings etc.
10.00am	Basic information - about faiths and cultures.
10.45am	Coffee
11.15am	Implications? - sharing insights with each other and putting questions to the team (in groups or plenary). Concluding story – to link with afternoon.
12.30pm	Lunch
1.30pm	Introduction of Issues -What is mental illness? Cultural variations: 1) grieving/depression; 2) rituals/obsessive behaviour (eg. repetitive washing); 3) holiness/psychosis (eg. taboos; visions).
2.15pm	Application to professional contexts (in groups with SIFRE tutors)
2.45pm	Tea
3.00pm	Questions
3.50pm	Concluding remarks and evaluation.

### **Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the day participants will:

- 1 Have explored and shared understandings of different religions and cultures, and become aware of the significance of religion to people from various minority groups.
- 2 Have increased their knowledge of the ways in which people from different religious and cultural backgrounds generally live their lives.

- 3 Have gained more understanding of roles within the family, and of norms within communities from the perspective of members of various religious and cultural groups.
- 4 Have begun to address the issues in relation to their professional contexts.

### **Possible Questions**

Is illness a punishment from God?

Would a person be shunned or avoided if it were known that they had been in a psychiatric hospital?

When people grieve too much, it can be classed as depression. How much grief is too much in your cultures?

Psychiatry is supposed to be very scientific. Religion is very un-scientific and mystical. How can the two ever work together?

Hearing voices is usually a sign of schizophrenia. But most religions were founded by people like Moses who saw and heard things. How do you reconcile this?

Some of these New Age groups advocate the use of magic mushrooms and other dangerous hallucinogens, which can lead to mental health problems. How much can society tolerate this sort of self-harm as just a “cultural difference”?

Some cultures believe that mental illness is caused by demonic possession, but saying things like that does not go down well with most psychiatrists. How can these cultural differences be handled?

### **A Letter to Members - 28 February 1999**

Dear Friends

It seems an appropriate moment to write and update you. SIFRE has seen many changes in the last few months but we hope we have now reached a period of stability. The AGM in January was well attended and we were able to sound out our membership on a number of issues concerning SIFRE’s future direction. We were very encouraged by the talk given by Harriet Crabtree, the Deputy Director of the Inter-Faith Network UK. Her perceptive overview of the inter-faith movement nationwide put SIFRE’s work into a very clear context. She said that we were the only local group in the network who ran an extensive educational programme.

She challenged all faiths to address the bigotry in their own traditions and her final remarks were on the theme of “never giving up!”

SIFRE’s new council has met and the Rev. Cliff Reed, Minister of the Ipswich Unitarian Meeting, who has taken a leading role in the inter-faith process in Ipswich for over twenty years, was appointed chairman. I continue as co-ordinating director and the council have appointed Robin Herne as Resources Officer and deputy co-ordinator. Council passed the following resolution - “that the number of members of the Limited Company of SIFRE be increased and that the category of associate be abolished.” Existing associates will be invited to become full members of SIFRE. They will then be eligible to vote at the AGM and at other General Meetings, so long as they have paid their annual subscription. Schools/organisations do not need to affiliate in order to use our services.

Our new centre at the Suffolk College is now set up to suit our purposes. There is a comfortable sitting area where people can make drinks, sit, read or chat and we hope that you will call in and give us your ideas for our future programme.

Meanwhile, please note the imminent dates on the diary:

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Tues. 15 June | UNA Conference at Cathedral in BSE, includes Inter-Faith seminar.   |
| Wed.23 June   | Jain Ethics- seminar at the Centre for the Study of Theology at Essex University  |
| Wed.30 June   | SIFRE evening Garden Party at Bishop Richard’s House, 4 Park Road.  |
| Sat. 19 June  | Coach outing to the Victoria and Albert Museum to see the unique display of Sikh art drawn from galleries all around the world. (cost £10). |
| Mon.30 Aug.   | All day walking pilgrimage in and around Ipswich .  |

We are looking forward to the launch in the Autumn of the part-time World Religions Certificate that we are running for the Centre of Continuing Education at Essex University. Teaching will take place on a weekday between 6-8pm. Please publicise this course. Participants can gain 80 credits at degree level one. We hope you will continue to support our work and look forward to hearing from you.

With very best wishes

Yours sincerely

Cynthia Capey, co-ordinating director.

# **Certificate Course in World Religions (Level 1)**

## **Centre for Lifelong Learning**

### **University of Essex**

#### **Outline Syllabus**

##### **Aim of the course**

The aim of the course is to provide foundations, framework, and tools for a serious and sensitive study of religion in the modern world. Within a common core of study, and with the help of specialist lecturers, students will be encouraged to explore their own interests, and to take their studies further.

##### **Expected learning outcomes**

Through their participation in the course, students will be expected

- (i) to have gained an understanding of basic concepts of major world religions;
- (ii) to have investigated the development of religions within different cultural contexts;
- (iii) to have explored the manifestation of faith and religious ideas within creative arts;
- (iv) to have begun to appreciate the perspectives, aspirations and experience of members of various faith communities within contemporary society.

##### **Course structure:**

The basis of the course will be 22 evening sessions, plus 2 half-day visits and a non-residential weekend school in each of two years. In addition, students will be encouraged to undertake a field trip, or visit a religious community between years 1 and 2.

##### **Breakdown of the course:**

The syllabus for the two years will be arranged as follows: Each year will be divided into two parts. In year 1, term 1 the focus will be on the Abrahamic religions; in year 2, term 1 the focus will be on Indic religions. In the second term of each year the work will be based around themes and concepts across both groups of religions.

## **Teaching Living Faiths**

*SIFRE's team of faith tutors have been invited into many Suffolk schools to support the teaching of RE and also to run conferences for 6th formers and other year groups on matters of life and death, marriage, breaking barriers, celebrating diversity and so on. They have also contributed to the initial training and in-service training of teachers of religious education. Some of our tutors have helped to develop the Suffolk Agreed Syllabus and they serve as faith representatives on the County SACRE.*

**7 July, 2000**

**Venue - Belstead House Conference Centre, Belstead, Ipswich.**

**Times: 9.15 - 16.30**

Course leader - Geoff. Hundleby, RE Adviser

We are very fortunate to have on this course, well-informed representatives of nine different faiths, who reflect the plural nature of Suffolk society. These representatives are part of the Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource (SIFRE) and they will be participating in this course as people who might be called upon to be a resource in RE lessons or to provide advice to schools on pastoral matters involving children from these faith backgrounds.

## **WEA Courses in Suffolk and Essex**

*SIFRE has been engaged to deliver many courses for the WEA in Suffolk and also in Essex. The most popular has been "World Religions Roundabout" but we have also delivered others including: Justice in the World's Religions, Islam in the Modern World, Sacred Animals, Celtic Mythology, Egyptian Mythology in various places including Beccles, Brandeston, Dunwich, Eye, Framlingham, Ipswich, Hargrave, Haverhill, Henley, Orford, Southwold, Stoke-by-Nayland Sudbury and West Bergholt.*

*Similar courses have also been delivered by SIFRE to Suffolk College's Friday Club.*

# ENGAGEMENT - PROBLEMS

## Circumcision for Religious Reasons

*Cynthia revisits a need still unmet 12 years later!*

*(We understand that provision has now been arranged by the PCT)*

In the summer of 1999, in response to enquiries I had received from Muslim families living in Suffolk, I endeavoured to ascertain what facilities there were in Suffolk for the circumcision of Muslim baby boys. At the end of December 1999, John Tuke, Consultant in Public Health Medicine informed me that six consultant urological surgeons from Suffolk Health would be prepared to perform the operation, using general anaesthetic, on children over 2 years old, and on a private basis only (£1000).

I consulted the Muslim Council of Great Britain and received on 2nd February 2000 a full and helpful reply from Dr. Saddam Alam, a member of their Health Working Committee. He informed us that there were other Trusts in the UK which offered a service free on the NHS, and that North Derbyshire NHS Trust, for example, made the service available for babies only a month old. He also pointed out the possible psychological suffering of Muslim boys who were not circumcised.

I then tried through John Tuke, consultant in public health medicine, to arrange a meeting between local Muslims and the consultants concerned, in order for some understanding of the issues to develop. I was offered a meeting with one consultant. On 16 June 2000 I went to see John Parry, Chair of the Advisory Surgical Committee (Ipswich Hospital, West Suffolk Hospital, James Paget Hospital) and Chair of the Medical Committee at Nuffield Private Hospital. He explained the situation thus:

The operation can only be done privately at present in Suffolk because the Suffolk Health Authority has not agreed that circumcision can be funded through the NHS. If the Health Authority gave such permission then the Trust could decide to make it available on the NHS.

If the Trust agreed to do this, then the surgeons prepared to carry out the operation would be able to do it on the NHS. The procedure could be done by urological surgeons, general surgeons and paediatricians. However, most would be unlikely to want to do it without having the child under a general anaesthetic. Anaesthetists would probably insist that the child was at least 2 years old.

If the operation was available on the NHS, parents would still have to take account of the fact that health budgets are limited and there are other operations and treatments which might take priority. Expect a waiting list of 6

months!

In summary, at the present time, parents wishing for circumcision for a son can either

1. Wait till the child is over 2 for the operation.
2. Contact their GP in the first instance.
3. Pay £90-100 for an initial consultation within the private sector.
4. Pay £980 for the operation (anaesthetic, surgical fee, accommodation etc)

This private service can be provided at the Trust or at the Nuffield or Christchurch Hospitals (neither of which are licensed for treating children under 2) or the parents can of course try to make alternative arrangements.

Mr Parry pointed out that Primary Care Groups would shortly take over funding and then GP groups could decide themselves whether to fund circumcision for religious reasons. He said that it would set a precedent if SHA and the existing NHS Trust made circumcision available on the NHS before the changes in fundholding arrangements took place. It would be wise to make representations now.

In July Dr Alam wrote to enquire about progress. At this point I was hopeful that progress might be made as I had been reporting the ongoing situation to the Ethnic Minorities Health Task group (Health Inequalities Programme). However, although the terms of reference of this group include identifying the needs of ethnic minorities and seeking ways in which they can be addressed the overall HIMP system does not seem to facilitate this. The issue has now been fed into the Suffolk Health Authority in various ways and nothing has changed.

It is difficult not to become cynical. There seems to be an managerial failure to take seriously the diversity of the local population and to respect the needs and aspirations of members of the local community groups, even though the minority groups are constantly being "consulted". The decision makers have not been transformed by real encounters at the grass roots. They do not understand what lies behind the ritual of circumcision.

### **Further background**

The Muslim community in Suffolk have actually suffered a loss of services. Mr Hen used to do the operation in Anglesea Road wing. Mr Mahmoud and Dr Mamajee also used to perform circumcisions for the local Muslim community. Some Bangladeshi families now arrange for a Doctor from Luton to visit Ipswich and circumcise 10-15 boys in their own homes, with approval from their GP's. The operation costs £60-70.

Sometimes there have been slight medical complications. The present request

for proper provision goes back at least 4 years. I understand that the Woodbridge Road practice and the Maternity Services Liaison Committee have highlighted the need.

In 1998 SIFRE produced an Inter-faith Community Handbook for Suffolk in consultation with the St. Clements and Ipswich Hospitals. This booklet explains that circumcision is necessary for Muslim boys and may be requested before the baby leaves hospital. This booklet has recently been updated and reaffirms this need.

I have ascertained that Dr Mamujee who is now retired is still willing to perform circumcisions if facilities are made available at the hospital. I have recently found out that circumcision is offered in Peterborough within the facilities of Doctors' surgeries.

Muslim members of SIFRE have recommended that the procedure should be a basic part of medical training - from the cradle to the grave. They have pointed out that it is a religious and ethical issue, and that it is a matter of human rights. Their comments are reinforced by the Home Office Report (February 2001) on Religious Discrimination in England and Wales.

In the light of the Health Authority's stated commitment to consider the needs of ethnic minorities, I urge Suffolk Health to give this practical and very significant matter their urgent attention.

Through this consultation process I have become more aware of the various dimensions (religious, cultural, emotional) to the circumcision debate and have become more sensitive to the needs of the Muslim community for whom this rite has great significance. I have also come to appreciate how easily professional, religious and personal stances can be misunderstood; and how easily people can feel belittled. I have also identified a deep-seated prejudicial attitude in the systems. There is an urgent need for more in depth education and training at all levels.

*For the Muslim as for the Jew, circumcision is the sign of the covenant between God and Man. Although an uncircumcised man may still be a Muslim, the rite of circumcision is a mark of the inclusion of the male into the community, and carries profound spiritual, and psychological benefits. In our fragmented society its contribution to an individual's well-being may be even more significant.*

*However, there is an important difference between Jews and Muslims in this matter. For Jews circumcision is a religious ceremony, carried out by a Mohel (a trained and certified practitioner) and performed within the religious community. For Muslims it is a religious requirement which is performed as a medical procedure.*

# THE NEW MILLENNIUM – Hopes and Fears

## *An Act of Common Commitment*

*This commitment was first used on 3rd January 2000 during the Celebration for Faith Communities of the United Kingdom, held at the Palace of Westminster to mark the beginning of the New Millennium. SIFRE was represented by Cynthia*

In a world scarred by the evils of war, racism, injustice and poverty, we offer this Joint Act of Commitment as we look to our shared future.

We commit ourselves,  
as people of many faiths,  
to work together for the common good,  
uniting to build a better society,  
grounded in values and ideals we share.

Community, personal integrity,  
a sense of right and wrong,  
learning, wisdom and love of truth,  
care and compassion, justice and peace,  
respect for one another,  
for the earth and its creatures.

We commit ourselves,  
in a spirit of friendship and co-operation,  
to work together,  
alongside all who share our values and ideals,  
to help bring about a better world,  
now and for generations to come.

## **Suffolk Refugee Support Forum**

### **Inaugural Meeting - Chairman's Report - 14 January 2000**

*SIFRE was instrumental in setting up SRSF and Cynthia was its first Chairperson.*

I am delighted to welcome you all to this inaugural meeting of the Suffolk Refugee Support Forum. Your presence is a clear indication of the importance of the task which is facing us. We embarked on a consultation process in June 1999 and the insights we gained soon convinced us that we would have to be properly constituted as a charitable company if we were going to tackle the many problems that were being identified. We have now achieved that status and we are about to appoint our board of directors/trustees.

It has been a hard slog to get to this point and I want to thank everyone who has been involved so far in the endeavours to tackle the challenge, for their commitment to the enterprise, their sharing of a vision, and their preparedness to speak frankly to each other about the difficulties they were facing. I am particularly grateful to Edward Asumda of ISCRE, who has been acting as our company secretary for all the spadework he has done, in particular the painstaking efforts he has made in the completion of the extensive (and horrific) paperwork. Today we appreciate the hospitality extended to us by the YMCA as we hold our 1st AGM here.

I am going to give a quick résumé of the forum's pre-history. From the start it has been a collaborative enterprise, but the trigger which started it was a chance encounter with a student in Suffolk College, a Muslim refugee who was trying to survive on vouchers for Sainsbury's. His particular circumstances highlighted a great many issues - not least the fact that there actually were refugees in Suffolk and that not many people knew about their existence. At the time there was a great deal of public good-will, especially towards Kosovan refugees, which could be harnessed, if the channels were opened up. But Suffolk actually had refugees from all around the world with various painful histories and different cultural backgrounds.

It soon became apparent that a multi-agency approach to the problem in a partnership with community groups, and willing individuals was absolutely vital if the whole problem was not going to get out of control, driving to despair the people working in the statutory sector who were faced with needs that were way beyond their existing resources. It also became clear that there were many housing associations, hotels, emergency aid agencies involved in one way or another, whose voice needed to be heard. There were also many untapped resources in the community at large, including the churches and the other faith communities. I now see the refugees as a catalyst - they have highlighted for me weaknesses in all our various organisations and systems, which could be classified as institutionalised inhumanity! They have also highlighted windows of opportunity.

Our forum met in June, July, September and November, involving representatives from Social Services, Housing, Benefits Agency, Suffolk Health, LEA, Suffolk College, churches, Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource, ISCRE, YMCA, IHAG, Red Cross, and refugees themselves.

We also made contact with the Refugee Council, Refugee Action, the Essex Refugee project and various other groups whose experience could enlighten us. We set up a steering group which met four times. The acting officers met frequently. At the same time Social Services was arranging consultations about the problem, and Ipswich Borough Council was consulting with the London

Boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea, and of Lambeth, and with Mulberry Properties, who proposed to refurbish Wilbury House in the Norwich Road as a hostel for refugees who were being dispersed from London. All these endeavours have come together.

While pursuing the goal of charitable status, we were also looking for premises, and seeking funding for staff. I understand that we have now acquired the use of premises at 38 St. Matthew's Street, which should be functional by the end of the month. It will provide office space, and serve as one-stop shop and drop-in centre. We have submitted several applications for funding, and the job specifications are drawn up for a project worker and administrator. We are gathering together a team of volunteers. We have been also been addressing problems as they have presented themselves, by working co-operatively, and seeking appropriate practical or financial support from private individuals or church groups. Here are a few examples:

Vouchers have been produced that could be used in a halal shop; clothing, toiletries, and stationery have been distributed, basic English books have been given; TV licences have been paid for; a cooker has been bought; bus fares have been paid so refugees in Felixstowe could attend classes in Ipswich; interpreters and dictionaries have been found, volunteers have offered to help with English classes; Arabic lessons have been given; some families and individual refugees have been put in touch with local people; Christian, Muslim and Sikh refugees have been linked up with their faith communities; housing has been sought; a few refugees have been found work; links have been made with the Princes Trust; an allotment scheme has been started.

We have produced a booklet "The Stranger in our Midst" to help voluntary groups respond efficiently and sensitively to the practical needs of refugees and we are now in the process of helping to draw up guidelines which can be given out to the refugees themselves - not exactly "Welcome to Suffolk" but rather "How to Survive in Suffolk". This is along the lines of an induction course that Suffolk College will be running to help refugees find their feet and learn basic information about the culture of this country, how to deal with their problems and how to access services.

On the 3 January I attended the inter-faith gathering in the House of Lords which marked the beginning of the new millennium. The common values were spelled out which the world religions hold in common with all people of goodwill - hospitality, care, compassion, justice, integrity. Tony Blair, Jack Straw, and Chris Smith, were present and voiced their support alongside the Chief Rabbi, Indarjit Singh, the President of the Association of British Mosques, the Archbishop of Canterbury and so on, for the vision of a wholesome society, as expressed by many different groups, including a very moving contribution by

young people from Northern Ireland.

The values rang out loud and clear - but how are they to be put into practice? What is the responsibility of central government, what are the responsibilities of the statutory bodies, what is the appropriate role of the faith communities and individuals? Who should pay for the bus fares to college, the train fares to Croydon, the prescriptions? What happens to the refugee with toothache? Who should pay the shortfall in the housing benefit? Where can refugees go when they feel really lonely or depressed? How do we discern our priorities? How do we equip ourselves for our involvement?

Suffolk is likely to receive many more refugees. We may have to work very hard to support them, particularly as there are not large groups here already from their countries of origin. But we have good race relations and therefore strong foundations on which to build, and an opportunity for further enrichment of our local communities.

### **SIFRE News Bulletin** **Journal for Religious Education Centres' 2003 edition**

I thought it might be interesting to describe a few of our summer jobs: A major task (and a very dusty one!) was to sort out thousands of books which were made available to us through someone's will. Our friend had amassed a fantastic collection of books on many subjects, but our major interest was in the theological and world religions ones. We have limited space, so in order to accommodate some of them, we have had to sort out all our other books! We have passed a large number on to other places, and we are also making up book boxes to loan out (*to study groups and WEA classes*).

An unexpected pressure came as a result of a phone call from the Festival Shop in Birmingham, which wanted to market our game "Diversity". They were planning to include it in their September catalogue and needed to stock copies of the game. However, as we were still piloting it, we were making a few at a time and the price they were offering was less than our production costs! We had to decide very fast whether to turn down their offer or try to do a major revamp. Fortunately, we managed to refine our process, and improve the game at the same time. We are relieved and excited that the game will be generally available throughout UK.

During this year we have also produced a second edition of our "Inter-faith Handbook for Community Use". This gives enough basic information to raise people's awareness of different faiths and cultures and to make them more sensitive to the needs of their clients, patients, colleagues and neighbours. I am now working on an appendix in the form of a table which shows the

languages and faiths which link with the various countries of origin. This information is particularly needed by those working with refugees and asylum seekers. Another project approaching completion is a small anthology called "Sacred Spaces, Special Places" which explores what counts as sacred space for different people. (*see below*)

We are now finalising our autumn programme of lectures and seminars. We ended last year's programme hosting an inter-faith evening for the Methodist Conference in Ipswich. This year's programme begins with an open morning at a local funeral director's to discuss how they can better serve the needs of people at times of bereavement, taking into account their faith and cultural backgrounds. We are expanding our team of visiting tutors from different faiths, who are available to talk to classes, to contribute to lecture series, to speak to community groups, to help with training for the health service, social services etc.

### **Sacred Spaces, Special Places For Pagans**

*(an extract from the book mentioned above)*

Different traditions of Paganism would give varied responses to this topic, but most would agree that ALL places are, ultimately, sacred and of value. There are no places which can be dismissed as profane or worthless in the Pagan world-view. The land itself is alive sentient, feeling, purposeful. Each place has a spirit, the genius loci of Roman lore, which both shapes the humans who live there and is, in turn, shaped by them. Strong emotions leave their residue for future generations to respond to great love, deep peace, joy of learning, intense hatred, utter despair etc.

What is a special place for us, is somewhere which echoes the needs of our soul at a given time. A serene woodland grove calls to the soul hankering for peace; a dusty mausoleum may open its arms to one seeking connection to their ancestors; a bleak, storm-wracked coast may grant a broken heart catharsis. The Pagan seeks to embrace darkness along with light, for all things have their purpose in the universe. A place of great horror, like Auschwitz, may have as much to say as any cathedral. Being sacred does not automatically mean being serene or happy. Pagan creeds do not necessarily strive to redeem or transform that which is disturbing, ugly, discordant. A dangerous volcano is as special as a peaceful forest glade.

Sometimes the most potent sites for a Pagan are those untouched by human hand of which there are increasingly few left in the world. As we stand at the doorway of the 21st Century, with our scientists and their financiers striving to seize control of the very building blocks of life itself, it is worth reflecting that

some of the most beautiful and awe-inspiring sites are those that remain just as the Gods created them. When humans seek to improve upon, add to, make more convenient, or just plain demolish, what nature has created the results are, all too frequently, disastrous.

Though Pagan civilisations have been as much part of this remodelling as anyone. Many modern Pagans find the vast temples of Egypt, Greece and Rome to be sources of immense wonder and spiritual uplift. Yet, for all the desire that emperors and pharaohs had for imposing themselves upon the landscape, much of the architecture is informed by a love of the natural world. One only has to think of the megalithic stone circles that dot Northern Europe, aligned to the passage of stars, sun and moon with baffling accuracy, to see that so many of these religious sites were means of studying and reflecting nature, rather than dominating or sublimating it.

Suffolk has no grand Pagan temples to speak of, no stone circles, no Hanging Gardens, no Mount Olympus. Yet there are magical places; quiet corners of woodlands, a particular babbling brook, a lonely field where the deer can be seen to run. Secret places where not many people go, and where (so far) no supermarket chain has felt the need to stick yet another ton of concrete and glass. That is how, I feel, they best remain. Secret

*Robin Herne*

## **World Religions Roundabout**

*A course delivered to Suffolk College Friday Club in the Autumn term 2002, and in a similar format to many WEA courses around Suffolk over the years.*

### **Course Rationale**

Suffolk is now a multi-faith, multi-cultural society. This may be more apparent in Ipswich but it is also true of other towns and villages. Although it is easy to stereotype, it is not often possible to discern a person's faith by the colour of their skin or by the clothes they wear. This course offers an opportunity to meet people from some of the world's faiths who live in this part of Suffolk, to learn about their basic beliefs and how they live their lives. It will also provide the opportunity to follow up with the course leader some of the points the speakers raise and to engage in further discussion.

## Course Aims.

To consider what is meant by the term “world religion”

To explore the religious diversity of Suffolk

To meet with practising members of some “world religions”

To learn about the basic beliefs and practices of those faiths

Speakers and topics

September 20	Pagans	Terry Smith
September 27	Hindus	Bandana Choudhury
October 4	Buddhists	Jnanamitra
October 11	Jains	Nayan Shah
October 18	Sikhs	Bhupindar Sually
Half Term		
November 1	Jews	Arleen Haigh
November 8	Muslims	Elahe Mojdehi
November 15	Christians	Elizabeth Serpell
November 22	Humanists	Margaret Nelson
November 29	Diversity	Playing the Game

## **Sex and Gender in the World's Religions**

*Another course from a series delivered by SIFRE to Suffolk College's Friday Club (for the over 50's)*

Fridays 10-11.30am in the SIFRE Centre T2

Friday Club Co-ordinator		Sandra Capener
Course Coordinator		Elizabeth Wesley
18 January	Pagan Passions	Robin Herne
25 January	Sexuality and Hinduism	Sushil Soni
1 February	Buddhism and Gender	Jnanamitra
8 February	Adam and Eve – an Islamic Perspective	Elahe Mojdehi
22 February	Men, Women and Equality in Sikhism	Bhupindar Singh Sually
1 March	Sex, Marriage and the Jewish family	Ruth Friedman
8 March	Christianity, Sex and Sin	Elizabeth Wesley
15 March	Being truly Human	Margaret Nelson
22 March	Sex Education in a Multi-Faith Society	Elizabeth Wesley

Topics to be included – origins, sexual orientation, gender roles, marriage, same sex relationships, but the overall balance depends on the speaker's perspective.

(Parking spaces to be arranged at the 7th day Adventists Church)

*A similar series was delivered by SIFRE at the lunchtime seminars run by the Centre for the Study of Theology at the University of Essex.*

# On Wings of Peace



*Detail from a stained glass Memorial Window to William Apps in the Church of Reconciliation at Hengrave Hall - designed and executed by Paul Quail*

**An evening of personal reflection with readings, music and dance, for September 11<sup>th</sup> with contributions from people of all ages and of many faiths on Wednesday September 11th 2002 from 7.00pm to 9.30pm in the Grand Hall of the Corn Exchange, Ipswich.**

The idea for the evening germinated within a small group of people involved with SIFRE. It was adopted and enabled by the 'Supporting Our Communities Group' which came into existence, through police initiative, as a result of the tragic events of September 11th 2001.

The Dalai Lama said that two responses to the terrible events of September 11th were possible. One came from fear, the other from love. "If we could love even those who have attacked us, and seek to understand why they have done so, we would become spiritual activists". For this to happen, he says, we need divine help and mutual support to grow in inner peace and wisdom. Each of us can contribute to healing the world.

On September 11th 2001, a young Muslim from Pakistan was evacuated from the World Trade Centre where he worked. He saw a dark cloud coming towards him. Trying to escape, he fell. An Hassidic Jew held out his hand saying "Brother, there's a cloud of glass coming at us, grab my hand, let's get the hell out of here." People of all faiths have held hands to support and comfort each other and to join together in prayer. Can we continue to hold hands as we shape a world society in which all people share to the full the precious gift of life?

*Revd Marcus Braybrooke, President of the World Congress of Faiths (quote).*

## FOCUS ON ISLAM

*Since the horrors of September 2001 and July 2003 which caused havoc and grief to so many lives and which brought Islam to the forefront of people's attention, SIFRE has been particularly concerned to support the Muslims in Suffolk and to increase our efforts to build bridges and to assist people to gain a deeper understanding of the faith. SIFRE arranged various events in 2001-4 including a Saturday exhibition in Ipswich library on the Heart of Islam, and a week long one in Endeavour House, where we also organised an Eid party.*

### Living our Faith and Loving our Neighbours

**An inter-faith day of study and interaction with JIMAS and SIFRE  
on Sunday the 21st of September 2003 at St Helen's School, Ipswich**

11:45 am – 12:45 pm	Exhibition open
12:45 pm - 100 pm	Welcome by M. Ali and Reverend Cliff Reed presidents of JIMAS & SIFRE respectively
1:00 pm – 1:10 pm	Mayor's address by Councillor Penny Breakwell
1:15 pm – 1:50 pm	Traditional Hot Meal
2:00 pm - 2:45 pm	Islam in Britain A Historical Overview by M. Seddon
2:45 pm - 3:15 pm	Muslims and British Culture by I. Golding
3:15 pm - 3:30 pm	Questions and answers
3:30 pm	15 minutes break
3:45 pm – 4:30 pm	Living Our Faith and Loving Our Neighbours by M. Ali
4:30 pm - 4:45 pm	Words of support from: Chief Constable Head of Social Care Services Lord Lieutenant Labour MP Chris Mole And others
4:45 pm - 5:00 pm	Questions and answers
5:00 pm – 5:45 pm	Tea and cakes

## **Islam in the Modern World**

### **10 week WEA course led by M.Mojlum Khan**

at the Library, Crescent Rd. Felixstowe - begins 13 September 2004 at 7.30pm

#### **Course Rationale**

Islam is a major world religion that has profound moral and spiritual teachings, and a very rich diversity of cultural expression. A study of Islam is necessary for a better understanding of the conditions that produced the current religious, cultural and political developments not only within the Muslim world but also across the globe. The picture of Islam as depicted by the mass media in the West also needs to be compared critically to the one presented of Islam by its adherents within Muslim communities, both in the East and West. This 10-week course will seek to provide a systematic but critical assessment of Islam as a religion, as a way of life and as a global political force.

#### **Course Aims**

to provide an introduction to the basic principles and teachings of Islam.

to provide a better understanding of the Islamic world-view.

to explore and deepen the understanding of the unity of Islam in the face of the huge diversity that prevails in the Muslim world.

to consider what it means to be a Muslim in the modern world and how to promote a better understanding between Islam and the West.

#### **Course Contents**

General Introduction: Introducing this course and an overview of its subject matter.

Divine Unity: The core foundation of Islamic world-view.

Allah's Word: Revelation of the Holy Qur'an, and its role in Islam. (invited guest speaker)

God's Emissary: The life of Prophet Muhammad and the formation of Muslim character and personality.

Which Islam? A geographical, historical, educational and demographic overview of the Muslim world. The political, economic and cultural dimensions of modern Islam.

Who is a Muslim? Problems of defining and identifying a Muslim in the modern world.

A Second Class-Citizen? The status and role of women in Islam and the Muslim world. (invited guest speaker)

Barbaric Law? Developing a better understanding and appreciation of Islamic Shari'ah (Islamic Law).

Jihad and Holy War: The concept of peace and war in Islam in the light of regional and global injustice, violence and terror. (invited guest speaker)

Demonising the Victim? A critical appreciation of the role of western media in misrepresenting Islam and Muslims.

Unity within Diversity: The Muslim world is united by faith but Muslims differ in their practices (possible panel of Muslim refugees). Question and answer session, and evaluation of the course.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Learners will be able to demonstrate a better and informed understanding of Islam as a religion and way of life.

Learners will be able to define and explain the basic tenets and characteristics of the Islamic faith and teachings.

Learners will be able to distinguish the ways of Islam compared to those of other religions and cultures.

Learners will be able to identify and explain the diversity that exists within the Muslim world.

Learners will be in a better position to explain some of the most contentious issues which are frequently (wrongly) ascribed to Islam and Muslims.

Books: SIFRE will provide a box of basic books on Islam. The Public Library is very well stocked with books on Islam. The tutor will recommend books during the course for further reading.

## **Muslim Christian Dialogue Report**

On 4 evenings in April and May 2004, St Edmundsbury Cathedral hosted a thought-provoking series of Christian/Muslim Dialogue organised by Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource and Elizabeth Moore, Lay Education Adviser for the Diocese, in conjunction with Churches Together in Bury. The issues under consideration were Globalisation & Consumerism, Governance & Democratic Society, Human Rights, and Justice & the Rule of Law. Well over 100 people from different Christian and Muslim backgrounds, took part in the seminars. Members of other faiths also attended.

Each evening consisted of introductory talks by a representative of each of the two faiths, followed by a discussion with an invited panel and then with the audience. It was interesting to hear how much agreement there was in most of these areas. Fair and just trade is of paramount importance in reducing poverty in the world as is the removal of protectionist policies by the west. The importance of building a just and open society together was stressed. The discussions were lively and challenging and difficult questions were answered thoughtfully and honestly.

Discussions on these themes are being held in 80 venues around the world and the results are to form the basis of a report to the Archbishop of Canterbury's Observer at the United Nations on whether there is evidence for a so-called "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West. It was emphasised by all the speakers at the Bury sessions that both Christians and Muslims are taught the importance of living in peace and harmony with their neighbours, whatever their faith.

Further details of the discussions can be found on [www.sifre.org.uk](http://www.sifre.org.uk) and details will shortly be available regarding follow-on opportunities.

*Philip Webber, member of the Cathedral Education Group*

## **DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY**

*A fruitful partnership between SIFRE and Suffolk County Council has steadily developed over the years. We have been contracted to deliver faith and culture seminars to county council employees, and we have held Saturday seminars in Ipswich library on various topics including “How can religions contribute to global peace?” and Living with Integrity? Faiths facing Questions”.*

*Andy Yacoub spotted the potential of the SIFRE Diversity game for SCC Management training and worked with us to plan and deliver this innovative conference in 2003, which involved 75 people from statutory bodies and 75 members of faith communities. Conferences on the same theme were held subsequently in Lowestoft and Bury St. Edmunds*

### **Questions of Identity Faith and Culture Wednesday 2 April 2003 at Ipswich School, Henley Road, Ipswich**

#### **Objectives**

- To create an atmosphere of mutual respect
- To learn together and broaden our perspectives
- To remove misunderstanding and raise awareness
- To apply our learning to our personal and professional lives

#### **Framework**

- Representatives of faiths and cultures in Suffolk will set up a Marketplace
- They will pose questions about their faiths in Question-time
- They will give the answers to their questions in Answer-time
- At all times they will be prepared to answer your questions about their faiths and cultures
- They will be involved in the running of the Diversity Workshops

## Timetable

9:00am	Arrival, registration and tour of the Marketplace of faiths	
9:45am	Plenary Session	
	9.45am	About the day (welcome): Chairpersons
	10.00am	Perspective on the Faith Communities: John Battle MP
	10.40am	Perspectives from the Faith Communities: Indarjit Singh OBE
11:00am	Question-time in the Marketplace of Faiths. (Refreshments available at faith stalls)	
12:00pm	Diversity Workshop 1 Engaging with people of different identities, faiths and cultures. (Delegates are divided into groups to begin to explore Diversity)	
1:00pm	LUNCH (Rooms will be available for prayers)	
2:00pm	Face to Face; Faith to Faith Elahe Mojdehi and Bhupindar Singh Sually	
2:30pm	Diversity Workshop 2 Working things out in a multi-faith society. (Delegates return to groups to continue exploring Diversity - refreshments available)	
	Diversity Workshop 2 (continued) Answer-time (Delegates discuss their answers to the Question-time quiz)	
4:00pm	Plenary feedback and comments Indarjit Singh OBE	
4:30pm	Closing remarks Chairpersons	
4:45pm	Close	

Workshops give the opportunity for delegates to meet in small groups on a human level with representatives from various faiths and cultures (African-Caribbean, Baha'i, Buddhist, Chinese, Christian, Hindu, Humanist, Jew, Muslim, Pagan, Sikh, Traveller-Gypsies). This avoids some people being exhibits and others learners! The issues raised by the Diversity experience relate both to the workplace and to ordinary life and include topics like diet, gender, rites of passage, leaders, symbols, festivals and worship. It addresses subjects like stereotyping and discrimination.



SIFRE's No 4 location at Suffolk College



The Plenary Session at the SCC / SIFRE 'Questions of Identity, Faith and Culture' in 2003



Contributed by the Children's Dance Class from the Suffolk Chinese Association at the Wings of Peace event in 2001

Fans have been used in both Eastern and Western countries for about three thousand years. The fan is mostly used as a cooling device, but it also has other uses. Its beautiful shape makes it a tool to use with light, music and dance to present the joyfulness of the Chinese Lunar New Year. Tonight it is used to express hope for new beginnings.



'The Masks of Faith'



Vinaya Kulkarni putting Henna on the children at the Occold Celebration of Diversity in Suffolk.



Photo shows two of our hosts from the Sikh community serving lunch to visiting school teachers.



SIFRE's No. 6 location at Suffolk College



SIFRE Staff meeting at Long Street (SIFRE's No 7 location)

## Who am I?

*Not all people fit neatly into boxes, and individuals choose to define themselves in various ways. So alongside the various faith stalls set up in the marketplace, there was another entitled "Who am I?" This stall had pictures, poems and other thought provoking material for visitors to reflect on, including this poem by a Suffolk College student.*

My name meaning eyes.

My roots background — Father House of Mewor

Mother House of Travencore

Father Aryan, Digamber Jain

Mother Dravidian, Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Christian

Both Indian origin so am I

and the religion of the family (that includes me) are both. By root I am Aryan.

Religion is not questioned but accepted.

no question has an answer — it can have many or no answers.

I was born into two religions and thus

I follow both.

I am currently a tutor for SIFRE

for both faiths and a student at

UCS in BSc(Hons) S.E.

My future ambition is to study a masters in S.E.

or Internet Studies

Working for SIFRE gives the feeling of being a valued member of the local community.

If I do leave Ipswich (because my

course is not offered here) then I would

like to carry on the same kind of work in other 'IFREs.'

Nayan Shah

## Faces of Suffolk.

Another joint enterprise of SCC and SIFRE was this ground-breaking exhibition



## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release - 20/11/2002

Faces of Suffolk required..

Suffolk people are being invited to contribute to a photographic exhibition which will offer a snapshot of 21st century life in their county.

By including photographs from all sections of the community, the exhibition, named Faces of Suffolk, will explore what it means to belong to the county. It is hoped that the photos will alter traditional stereotypes and challenge racism. It is being organised by Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource, with support from Suffolk Connexions, Suffolk Constabulary and the Refugee Council.

Dr Sarah Shaw, Education Officer at Suffolk Racial Harassment Initiative, said: "This exhibition will celebrate Suffolk's diversity and culture but volunteers are needed to help us with this exciting project. We want photographs of ordinary people doing everyday activities We want to include all sections of the community; those from traditional Suffolk backgrounds as well as members of minority ethnic groups and Travellers."

The exhibition will be launched in March 2003 and will go to seven venues across the county. It will be supported by workshops and discussions around diversity and good citizenship which will be aimed especially at young people.

People can get involved in the exhibition either by being photographed or by contributing photos. For further information, contact Gita Banerji at Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource on 01473-343661

The Exhibition was launched by Chinwe Chukwuogo-Roy on Tuesday 10th June 2003 in the Robert Cross Hall at the Ipswich Corn Exchange

## Masks of Faith

*Masks of Faith is a work of art by Jane Timmins; who produced it as part of her BA Hons, Fine Art Level 3, Collaborative Project, 2004-5. SIFRE was Jane's collaborative partner. She produced two works; 'Masks of Faith' and 'Unity in Diversity, Diversity in Unity'.*

"In my collaboration with SIFRE, Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource, I have been exploring religions of the world and how they are seemingly being influenced by consumerism, which is rapidly becoming the new world faith.

Mankind tends to be transparent, people only being recognised by the mask they wear, their true identity remaining hidden. I have tried to portray this in the 'Masks of Faith'. The mirrored background reflecting everything surrounding them, the religious symbols in vibrant colours representing consumerism, yet those symbols are still the anchor for many of the faithful, and all being bound together in a circle, showing how at the core of everything, whatever our differences, we are all one."

*Jane Timmins*

*Masks of Faith was launched on Thursday 10th February 2004 at the Ipswich Unitarian Meeting House. The Revd Cliff Reed used it as the focus of his sermon on Sunday 13th February.*

In her brief written introduction to her work, 'Masks of Faith', the artist Jane Timmins writes: 'Mankind tends to be transparent, people only being recognised by the masks they wear, their true identity remaining hidden.' Jane has created a circle of transparent faces, but each one is masked with the symbol of a faith tradition. The bright colours of the 'Masks of Faith', Jane tells us, represent the consumerism that has spread from the secular values of a consumer society to religion. And maybe, because they are only masks, they might also represent the superficiality of faith bought 'off the shelf' in the multi-faith market place!

In fact, the association of masks with religion is a very ancient one. In ancient Greece and Rome masks were used in drama, and drama was a religious matter. Not only did the plays themselves draw on the myths and characters of Graeco-Roman religion, but the dramatic performance was itself a religious event. Theatres were associated with temples, as in the case of the theatre of Dionysus below the Acropolis in Athens. This was the scene of the Great Dionysia, a sort of theatrical Olympics attended by visitors from all over the Hellenic world. In the seat of honour sat the priest of the god Dionysus, and

the event was a state holiday so that everyone could attend. Even prisoners were released on bail so they could come!

Such festivals were popular and widespread, with the plays exploring all manner of religious and ethical issues, and the relationships between gods and human beings. And the actors all wore masks, so becoming more completely the character they portrayed, with their own identity being concealed. And the masks are believed to have had another function, that of amplifying the actors' voices. This was an important practical consideration in large, crowded open-air theatres, but it also made the characters more imposing, more like the gods, goddesses and mythic heroes they represented.

The Latin word for these dramatic masks is 'persona', which also came to mean the characters who the actors played. And so it also came to mean the character, the 'part', that someone sustains in the world or presents to it. Of course, our word 'person' comes from 'persona', but its meaning is significantly different. This is why the word 'person' is theologically problematic. When the doctrine of the Trinity was emerging, the three 'persons' were 'persona' – the masks of God. They were three ways, or modes, in which God presents himself to the world, or is apprehended by it. Only later, when 'person' came to mean a distinct and independent individual, did the idea of 'one God in three persons' become incompatible with simple monotheism. A single indivisible God who is seen or experienced in three different ways, who wears three different masks for different roles as an actor may change 'persona', is a much more comprehensible concept. It accords with human experience without being a quite needless affront to human reason!

But even this idea of God, a God who wears masks and who has three distinct 'persona', was Greek rather than Jewish. It belongs to a later period of Christian history than that recorded in the New Testament and was never used by Jesus. Indeed, the only reference to a theatre in the Bible comes in the Acts of the Apostles (19:23-41). Paul and his companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, are dragged into the theatre in Ephesus by an angry mob – and it wasn't to see a play! As devotees of the goddess Artemis, or Diana, to whom the city's great temple was dedicated, the locals didn't take kindly to Paul's preaching and he and his companions were lucky to escape with their lives. That theatre would more usually have been used for plays in which gods, heroes and human beings were played by actors wearing 'persona'. These masks almost encased the head and amplified, even altered, the voice, so rendering the actors themselves anonymous as individuals. And that is something that a mask, even a mask of faith, can still do.

But if we translate 'persona' as mask, where did the word 'mask' come from? And this too is relevant to our theme. It also explains why the word 'mask'

always has a rather sinister feel to it. The Latin word 'masca' means a hideous covering worn over the face so as to frighten other people. It could also mean the ghost or witch that such a mask might portray. 'Masca' could thus mean a sorcerer or an evil spirit, a shape-changing wizard, a werewolf or similar metamorphic monster. To wear the mask was, in a sense, to become what the mask represented. So if you wanted to scare someone half to death, and maybe commit a crime as well, then you donned the 'masca', or maybe just daubed your face with soot or other dark material – hence the word 'mascara'!

Of course, masks originally meant to terrify can easily become things of fun and entertainment, while still having something mysterious, 'something of the night', about them. Hence the masquerade, the masked ball and similar events where hiding your true identity could be a cover for nefarious activities and illicit assignments! But even in this more light-hearted, Hallowe'en sense, the mask retains something of that original Latin meaning, when the masca was not simply a scary face covering, it might also be the scary creature underneath!

Masks, whether 'persona' or 'masca', have always been associated with religion, with mythology and with the so-called 'supernatural'. To talk of 'masks of faith', therefore, is to tap into a very ancient concept. But what can it mean for us?

In many ways, to talk of a 'mask of faith' is a negative thing. It suggests deception, concealment and even imprisonment. Whereas faith should be a liberating thing, the conventions and restrictions of a religious institution can be anything but liberating. A 'mask of faith', in this context, is more analogous to the iron mask of Alexandre Dumas' mysterious prisoner. The human spirit is both trapped and hidden but struggling to break free. The religion of oppression burdens the soul with guilt, fear and regulations that enslave it with man-made dogma. It stifles the Spirit of love and liberty. As Jesus said of those who use religion to bind people rather than to free them, 'They make up heavy loads and pile them on the shoulders of others, but will not...lift a finger to ease the burden.' (Matthew 23: 4)

A 'mask of faith' can also be a device created to deceive - to conceal malice, pride and selfish ambition beneath a pretended piety. Again, some words of Jesus seem appropriate: 'You are like tombs covered with whitewash; they look fine on the outside, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and corruption.' (Matthew 23: 27) This, of course, is a definition of hypocrisy – and hypocrites were the targets for Jesus' most angry words. And this word takes us back to the theatre, for the original Greek word, 'hypocrisis', means playing a part on stage as well as dissembling and outward show – or hypocrisy. Jesus came closest to talking about masks when he warned against, '...false prophets who come to you dressed up as sheep while underneath they are savage

wolves.’ (Matthew 7: 15) Sadly, this particular ‘mask of faith’ can still be found, worn by those who pretend allegiance to the God of love, the God of mercy and compassion, but in his name commit acts of murder, terrorism and oppression. Such ‘false prophets’ play on vulnerable minds and pervert them into committing deeds of inhumanity and true blasphemy.

But ‘masks of faith’ need not mean such things, which are more akin to ‘masca’ than ‘persona’. Sometimes, perhaps most times, what you see is what you get. The person behind the ‘persona’ is a sincere and authentic representative of the faith whose mask they wear. The mask is thus not a thing of deception but rather the outer face of the inner reality. But, of course, the inner reality is so much more than the mask, so much deeper and more complex. The mask is an indicator of aspiration, allegiance and religious identity but it cannot reveal the soul, the spirit, within. This is why we should be careful about what we read into the ‘mask of faith’ that another person wears.

We should beware of imposing our own stereotypes and prejudices on the basis of someone’s ‘mask of faith’, which may consist of little more than the clothes they wear, the place they worship or the language of their devotion. Just as Jane Timmins’ ‘Masks of Faith’ are transparent beneath the religious symbol, so we need to look much deeper to know the true nature of the wearer’s faith – if, indeed, we can ever penetrate the secrets of the heart.

Just as some may hide behind their ‘mask of faith’ in a dishonest way, so may others simply be hidden by their mask – not for any unworthy reason but simply because their faith is a private matter between themselves and God. They do not make a show of their religion but instead follow the advice of Jesus: ‘...when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret.’ (Matthew 6: 6) Such folk are known by the way they live their lives rather than by the mask they wear.

To wear our ‘masks of faith’ together as members of one faith community (and like the chorus in a Greek drama) is a way in which we can feel and express our solidarity, and make common witness to the faith and the values that we share. And that, in itself, is a positive thing. But there are dangers too. An authentic, shared solidarity can spill over into an oppressive uniformity that will not tolerate the differences that are inevitable in any human community. The result is intolerance of the dissenting voice, the exclusion of the minority opinion, even the hunting down and burning of the so-called ‘heretic’. And this sort of negative, oppressive solidarity turns one faith community against another – sect against sect, religion against religion. The masks then become more like the helmets that hid the faces of Greek warriors drawn up for battle. Or maybe they are analogous to the shirts of rival gangs of football hooligans, who have forgotten the whole point of the game they claim to follow!

The 'Masks of Faith' as Jane has made them are, in part, transparent. Thus, whatever mask someone may wear, we should look through it and see behind and beneath the religious symbol. There we see the real person, the common humanity, the deeper reality of divine and human unity. The many colours and forms of religious symbolism are not divisive when seen in this light. Rather they represent the rich diversity of our faith communities, each one a reflection and product of the universal striving after God – our ultimate source and our sustaining breath, the Great Mystery in which we have our being. Jane Timmins' 'Masks of Faith' stand in a reflecting circle looking out, symbol at once of our oneness and our willingness to meet each other face to face.

*Revd Cliff Reed*

*Minister of Ipswich Unitarian Meeting House.*

## **2007 - European Year of Equal Opportunities and Diversity**

*This article was submitted by the Equality and Human Rights' Commission of the East of England Region to commend Diversity as an outstanding resource.*

Playing the 'Diversity' card is proving a strong driver for understanding in hundreds of UK organisations ranging from businesses to prisons, from the emergency services to schools and colleges. As a result, the training tool DIVERSITY, devised and developed by Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource (SIFRE), is being highlighted, in the European Year of Equal Opportunities, as a positive example of projects in the UK working to create a fairer and more equal society.

The idea for DIVERSITY came from Cynthia Capey, SIFRE's founder, and now its Education and Training Officer. As she explains, "I was struck by the inability of people to see issues through the eyes of others. But that, of course, is largely due to a lack of understanding born of a lack of knowledge."

DIVERSITY invites participants to face up to a series of challenges but, rather than from the restrictive comfort of their own background, to do so as a member of a faith group that is unfamiliar to them. It provides them with basic information that enables them to enter into a discussion with the rest of the group. It highlights facts and challenges ignorance and misconceptions.

Covering twelve faiths found in the East of England (Bahai's, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Humanists, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Pagans, Sikhs, Taoists and Zoroastrians), some 2,000 copies of DIVERSITY are already in circulation. Designed for 12 people, together with a facilitator, it works well with fewer and has involved groups as large as 30, successfully.

The challenges fall into three broad categories spanning identity, encounter and treatment.

The pack consists of a standard size board together with counters, dice, information cards, challenge cards and the 4th edition of SIFRE's Inter-Faith Handbook. A 3x3ft mat is available as an optional extra. Sessions usually last for 2-3 hours, and involve everyone in lively discussion, engagement with complex issues and moments of great insight or pure humour.

"While we can only provide a basic knowledge of the beliefs and practices of others, our training lays foundations for empathy, respect and understanding, which are basic requirements for building a cohesive community", Cynthia said. "The challenges contained in DIVERSITY explore significant issues which confront us all, both in our professional and in our personal lives."

DIVERSITY is proving so popular that SIFRE has been asked whether it can be available in other languages. It was featured at the World Scout Jamboree 2007 held in Essex and, most recently, was used at a conference for youth leaders from Romania, Bulgaria, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Turkey and Israel.

Other resources produced by SIFRE include a series on "What do the Faiths Teach about Democracy" (Health, Justice.. and so on) and a booklet designed to assist those supporting asylum seekers and refugees. It also runs a range of events and earlier this year organised a major conference on faith and sexuality. It will shortly publish a report based on the event.

## Faiths and Sexual Orientation

*Report on sessions facilitated by SIFRE from September 2005- February 2006*

We initiated this study through a series of 4 workshops in the SIFRE Centre for representatives of the faiths and people working in the community to start an open and honest dialogue. The traditional teachings of the faiths were examined in the context of modern society and in the light of people's experiences. The contributions were frank, difficult questions were faced and the discussions were very focussed and sometimes painful. We then held a seminar in Ipswich Library to which other people were invited, a provisional report was given and more insights were received. This series concluded with a further session of reporting back with discussion at Lowestoft College, for the benefit of Waveney Community Cohesion Partnership.

During these various sessions we were able to hear the perspectives of people who were present from the following faiths – Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian (including Anglican, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, Unitarian), Hindu, Humanist, Jewish, Muslim, Pagan and Sikh and also reported statements from people from the Jain and Zoroastrian faiths and other Christian denominations. Representatives from the following services also attended and made valuable contributions: SCC, Social Care, Connexions, Police, Victim Support, Registrars, Mesmac and other people working as counsellors or involved with support networks. Although we hope to do a lot more work around the subject, the following points are already clear

- some faiths have very strong teachings against same-sex relationships, but internal pressure groups as well as external forces are now challenging them
- we need to have a historical perspective on the subject and to understand the social and cultural contexts in which traditions have developed
- if we get behind the various translations and official or idiosyncratic interpretations of sacred texts, they may open up to alternative readings and have quite a different impact when not taken at face value
- the authority of texts may need to be challenged by the authority of conscience and experience
- the issues around sexual orientation need to be tackled sensitively using everybody's insights.

*We followed this up with a regional conference in partnership with SCC and EEFA. A report on that is available. Further research was then conducted by Jnanamitra Emmett, the EEFA faith Officer. Her findings are available online.*

## **ENGAGEMENT WITH THE FAITHS**

### **Celebration of Diverse Suffolk in Occold Church in May 2007**

The Celebration of Diverse Suffolk held at St Michael's and All Angels Church, Occold, from 12 -20 May 2007 was an innovative event undertaken enthusiastically by a church in a small village in co-operation with Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource. It was designed to give people of all ages and backgrounds living in High Suffolk the opportunity to meet people of other faiths and cultures and to share in the dialogue that is already going on in Ipswich, Bury and Lowestoft and other towns and villages.

The "Faces of Suffolk" photographic exhibition was on display in both Occold Church and Eye Parish Church and this set the scene, beautifully capturing the growing diversity of the county – including people whose families have lived and worked here for generations and also more recent arrivals. One 5 year old was so excited by the exhibition when she visited Occold Church with her primary school that she came back later bringing her parents to see it.

A Friday evening preview of the exhibition for the Eye Benefice was followed by a service of Compline. On Saturday, the public opening of the Festival was conducted by Sara Michell, Diversity Portfolio Holder for Mid-Suffolk District Council. This was followed by a talk on "The Kingdom of the Wuffingas" by Terry Smith, who is Thyle to an East Anglian Heathen Kindred. He gave a whistle-stop tour of the Wuffing Dynasty, who could be credited with giving East Anglia its identity, and then explored in more detail the reigns and significance of Kings Raedwald and Edmund.

A Sunday service, on the theme of peace and reconciliation, was attended by visitors with roots in the West Indies, East Africa and the Balkans. Graciano Masauso, from Zimbabwe, spoke movingly about his country's predicament and its impact on his own life, and gratefully about the hospitality he has received in Suffolk, particularly in Occold, where he feels at home. The lunch after the service included African dishes prepared by one of our visitors.

During the following five weekdays there were opportunities to meet Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Jains, Jews and Buddhists in Occold Church. The lunch-time and evening sessions were aimed at adults and drew in people working for Social Care Services, the Fire Service and the Police as well as local people and others from neighbouring villages who commented that they wished more people had realised the range and quality of what was on offer and had come along to the seminars. Nevertheless, those who did attend came back again and again and represented a good cross section of the community. Also, there were a number of people who came into the Church at other times to view the exhibition.

The speakers spent all day in Occold and shared information about their faiths and lives without reserve in response to the ages and interests of their audiences. Challenging questions about all aspects of life relevant to adults as well as children emerged during the week – not least our relationship with the natural world. Dr. Atul Shah speaking about the ancient Jain faith, one of the oldest non-violent religions in the world said “We respect all living beings, including insects. In fact, we protect those who are smaller or weaker than us – that is our duty. For the Jains, there is no boundary between human diversity and bio-diversity. All living beings have an equal right to live and grow on this planet.”

Five Primary schools (Occold, Eye, Thorndon, Hoxne and Mellis) and Occold Pre-school Playgroup came along to the children’s sessions and our speakers also visited Debenham High on four of the days. The programme for the children included all sorts of experiences – trying different kinds of food, tying a Sikh turban, colouring a picture of a Mosque, blowing the Jewish ram’s horn, chanting, sitting quietly, making rangoli patterns and henna painting. Vinaya Kulkarni commented: “The children were so excited and enthusiastic, and everyone wanted Henna painted on their hands, even the boys! Hindus are very open-minded and love to share their culture with others, and this is a unique way to build bridges.”

The children were very responsive and full of questions about many aspects of life and death and their teachers were grateful for this opportunity, especially as they are in the process of implementing the new Suffolk RE Syllabus, which encourages them to organise visits and to make contact with real people from the faiths.

The Head Teacher at Occold, Mr Knights said, “This has been a very interesting week for the children at Occold School. To be able to question people from other faith groups on our doorstep has enabled us to learn a great deal about them. It is important to understand others while maintaining our own beliefs.”

Paula Evans from Thorndon Primary emailed: “Thank you for organising the visits in Occold church. I accompanied the children in key stage 2 to meet the Muslims and the Sikhs. Our children were fascinated with the tying of the Sikh turban on one the head of one of our pupils. They especially enjoyed it when the Sikh gentlemen were able to come and talk closely to them all when they were offering the shared food. This made it very personal and also friendly. I felt that there was a lot of value in the children meeting such personable representatives of different faiths in a familiar setting as the opportunity for mixing with people from different faiths is very small in our rural communities.”

Teacher, Paul Ryle from Mellis Primary wrote: “We all (parents, teacher and children) found it very informative, and think that the idea of such inter-faith meetings is a valuable way of increasing understanding between faiths.”

A pupil at Debenham High emailed: “I am writing to thank Elizabeth Sugarman for coming into my lesson today and giving us an insight into Judaism. Good luck to you and your organization. You really do deserve to do well and accomplish your hopes.”

On the final Saturday, we were privileged to have Romany people with us. They showed their film “A Gypsy’s Wish” – brought family photos and talked about the impact of “modernisation” on their traditional ways of living. It was noticeable from the photos how they lived in harmony with nature when they were able to work on the land. Later, young members of the Romany Theatre Company shared with us a story from Auschwitz and poems they had previously narrated at the Holocaust Memorial Day. Their contribution highlighted the dangers of marginalising and victimising any group and led into a very constructive question and answer session.

Overall the ten-day event was very stimulating and thought provoking. It contributed to the contemporary debate about the role of a church building, especially in a village, within the total life of the local community. It gave people the opportunity to talk to each other across various boundaries, including those of race and faith, about common concerns, and to consider the relevance of the principles and insights of Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Jews and others in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The series was organised by the PCC of St. Michael and All Angels, Occold, in conjunction with Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource (SIFRE) with financial support from Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Constabulary, and Mid-Suffolk District Council.

### **Food for thought:**

Conversation with Primary school child: “My mother is a Buddhist” “Is she? What do you think a Buddhist is?” “My Mum says that some people are awake and some just aren’t.”

Comment from a Romany: “We feel at home in Churches. We used to draw our water from the taps in churchyards.....”

## Faith and Food at Tattingstone Church

*People from many denominations of Christians, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, URC, Latter-day Saints, Salvation Army, Society of Friends, Christian Scientists, Seventh-day Adventists and Unitarians have been involved in inter-faith dialogue in Suffolk, not just in major towns but in rural Suffolk too!*

You wouldn't think there was much opportunity for Interfaith dialogue in a sleepy village in the heart of the rural Suffolk countryside – but you couldn't be more wrong.

Under the initiative of the Parochial Church Council in 2005, to 'open its doors', St Mary's church has hosted a variety of events some of which have been secular but many have been religious.

During 2007 and 2008, the theme has been 'Food and Faith', but perhaps should be better entitled 'Culture and Cuisine'

By inviting representatives from other faith communities, mainly located in nearby Ipswich Town, the villagers of Tattingstone and the environs have truly engaged in some fascinating interfaith dialogue.

With representatives from the Chinese community, discussions about Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and first hand experiences of village life under Chairman Mao proved fascinating. And of course some excellent cuisine to finish with.

The story of Judaism and the life of a Jew in Suffolk provided a very sobering evening, especially on the subject of 'forgiveness' in the light of the Holocaust.

As expected, the two Muslim young women evoked a whole range of questions concerning attitudes, extremism, Sharia and lifestyles.

Whilst our Hindu representatives transported us to Bollywood with dancing and entertainment.

Suffice to say, each of the evenings we have held have been engaging, informative and fascinating, discovering not just our faith differences, but our similarities as well. And there is a sense of expectancy from the villagers as to what our next meeting will provide. The food, as always, is the icing on the cake.

In summary it's not often you hear a rural Suffolk ol' boy ask 'So, Rector, when are the Sikhs coming?' – but it's quite refreshing when you do!

*Revd Chris Wingfield.*

## **A Shared Experience**

*Many places of worship regularly open their doors to welcome visitors from different faiths and to enable teachers, schoolchildren, police, community support officers and others to enhance their knowledge and gain greater insight. We regularly arrange visits to Buddhist Centres, Hindu Mandirs, Sikh Gurdwaras, Mosques and Synagogues*

“...and the Sikhism Inset for R.E. Teachers will be held at the Gurdwara with lunch served in the Langar”. Who could resist the offer of a day out of a school, not at the usual training centre, pleasant as it is, but in a real place of worship where we could learn at first hand what goes on in a Gurdwara? Our new Agreed Syllabus identifies the use of visiting places of worship as a means to “enrich and broaden pupils learning in RE”. What better way for us as teachers to experience this for ourselves. Of course the bonus of having the Langar (kitchen or the food served in it) was the icing on the cake!

The Langar at the Guru Nanak Gurdwara, Ipswich, doubles up as a training area and this was our base for the day. Our charming host Bhupindar Sually, made us feel most welcome and invited us to come any time on a Sunday to witness the act of worship and partake of the Karah Parshad, sacred food made of flour, ghee, sugar and water, offered to the congregation and visitors at the end of worship. Hospitality, as we were to find out throughout the day, is an important part of Sikh teaching and everyone, Sikh or non-Sikh, visiting a Gurdwara is welcome to also share the vegetarian food prepared in the Langar.

A tour of the Darbar Sahib (Prayer Hall) lead by our eloquent and knowledgeable host also included a chance to see where the Guru Granth Sahib (Holy Scriptures) is laid to rest at night. At lunchtime we were offered a delicious vegetarian curry, pakora, samosas, and cucumber sandwiches accompanied by a colourful mixed salad. There were signs up reminding us not to waste any of the food but there was no need to worry on that score! Guru Nanak taught that everyone is equal before God regardless of status, income, gender, race and religion. He established Kartarpur as a place of learning for his disciples and visitors were fed at a free kitchen. Our lunch was donated and prepared by members of the local Sikh community and served by some of the men, who had kindly taken time off from work to help host the training day. Through this kind act, the principles of Vand chhakna (Sharing with Others) were clearly shown to us.

The training day was so clearly enhanced by its location. The teachers experienced at first hand the building, the warmth and kindness of the Sikh community and the opportunity to have dialogue with members of the Sikh faith. On reflection I realised I had experienced the true meaning of sharing. The memory of that visit will remain with me for a long time.

*Elizabeth Bennett*

## **ENGAGEMENT WITH COUNCILS**

### **A Thought for the Day on Saxon Suffolk**

*Terry Smith delivered this Thought for the Day to Suffolk County Councillors in 2002. They were about to set the budget. Terry received a standing ovation.*

Thank you for asking me to come and speak to you today. In preparing my talk I was very aware of Ipswich's Saxon Founding Fathers and the fact that Suffolk was the southern province of the Saxon Kingdom of the Eastern Angles. It is the Saxons who gave us the names for the days of the week, and we know that Tuesday is named after the Saxon god Tiw. Tiw was considered by the Saxons to be the patron god of Law and Government. It could possibly be deemed therefore that Tuesday could be a good day for a council to meet and conduct its business.

What do we know about Tiw? He was one of the Aesir family of gods from Northern Europe. When the Worlds were confronted with the prospect of chaos and disorder being let loose upon them, it was Tiw among the gods who sacrificed his hand in order that the wolf could be tethered and the worlds saved.

The Saxons believed that to govern you had to be prepared to sacrifice yourself in order to serve honourably and justly. Sacrifice in Saxon times was very different to what it is today, but sacrifice is still pertinent. In order to lead your community you must serve your community, you are available and at the beck and call of your constituents.

You sacrifice your time selflessly in order to ensure the continuum of local government and therefore are the main players in the writing of the local history of tomorrow. The burden of decision making is upon you. This cannot always be easy, what with the demands on the purse, and the importance of the maximisation of resources. The path you tread is not an easy one. On occasions you will be damned if you do or damned if you don't. Your calling is not always a bed of roses.

Woden was another Saxon god, indeed he was to them the "ALL FATHER", "THE HIGH ONE", "A GOD ABOVE GODS". It is from him that we have the HAVAMAL - translated as "The Words of the High One". These have been handed down to us in the Eddas - Works of prose and poetry. The Words of the High One advise us to moderation in most things, and of the qualities pertinent to government we are advised that persons in government:

Should be prudent in their dealings.

Should know their assets and deploy them wisely with foresight.

The Words of the High One also advise us that to debate in the process of deliberation is healthy. So perhaps not so much has changed since the times of the early Saxon settlers.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you well in your meeting and to thank you for inviting me here today to talk to you.

*Terry Smith*

### **Thought for the Day - Ipswich Borough Council - Lent 2009**

*The regular meetings of Ipswich Borough Council have traditionally begun with a prayer or thought for the day. SIFRE has the privilege of suggesting people from the local community; they represent a wide range of experience.*

As we start the Lent journey, as a Christian I am reminded that, as Jesus went into the desert for 40 days and nights to fast, meditate and reflect on His path; this is a good time for me to reflect on mine.

In my job, as a police officer training new recruits, we are often in contact with people in other faiths, and part of the student officers training now is to go on multi-faith visits; for instance to the mosque, gurdwara or church; where they can meet and speak with people on different faith paths; asking the difficult questions to bust myth.

What strikes me during these visits is not the differences; which are unique and wonderful; but the similarities that should be celebrated within our communities. The new recruit goes operational with an awareness of customs and an informed truth of the reality behind the faith or culture. This in turn gives confidence to the officers to liaise, help and support all members of the community. Diversity for me is not treating everyone the same, but treating everyone according to their needs and with respect. This of course all helps people to feel safe and able to approach the police over any matter.

We are all on different paths; we all have different ideas; but we all have similarities, such as family and security; our faith paths are not as different as we may think. As I reflect on my path I am aware that I'm not that sure what it is or where it goes. But I do I know there are brothers and sisters out there who are only too willing to be a guide. With this in mind, I would like to use a prayer written by Thomas Merton, a Cistercian monk, who was a pioneer in interfaith dialogue.

MY LORD GOD, I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.

And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Amen.

*Police trainer, Simon Chenery*

## **SIFRE in Waveney**

*SIFRE has run a series of conferences at Lowestoft College in partnership with the District Council and the Waveney Community Cohesion Partnership, with support from the County Council. This is one of them.*

### **Waveney – Our Shared Values**

Waveney Community Cohesion Partnership and Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource invite you to a celebration on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2007 in the Horizon Centre at Lowestoft College

#### **The day**

Everyone is welcome to attend this event which is being promoted by Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource (SIFRE) on behalf of the Waveney Community Cohesion Partnership to enable people living and working in the area to get to know each other better and to explore and to celebrate their common values.

#### **The cost**

There will be a registration fee of £5. Lunch will be provided and everyone attending will be offered a copy of SIFRE's Handbook of Faiths (outlining the beliefs and practices of people of different faiths and cultures).

## The Timetable

9:30 am	Marketplace opens: This includes information stalls representing faith, cultural and community groups. There will also be representatives of voluntary and statutory agencies who support the community. The “Faces of Suffolk” Exhibition will also be on display.
9:30 am	Registration and coffee
10:00 am	Welcome Jennifer Langeskov, Head of Student Support at Lowestoft College. Julia Stephens-Row, Head of Social Inclusion, Suffolk County Council. “Building our Community on Shared Values” an introduction by a representative of SIFRE.
10:15 am	“Sharing our Values”: People from various religious and cultural backgrounds, and with experiences reflecting many aspects of diversity, introduce themselves and share aspects of their life, values and aspirations.
11:00 am	Refreshments
11:30 am	“Sharing our Values”: Workshops in which to reflect on the conference theme; to consider our values, including areas of conflicting values, and to raise issues for the afternoon which relate to people’s personal lives and public lives and to their places of work. (Please hand in questions/comments before lunch)
12:45 pm	LUNCH and time to explore the market-place
1:30 pm	“Moving on Together”: A panel addresses issues arising from the morning session and initiates a discussion with the audience.
2:30 pm	Summing up Cathy Craig, and representatives of Waveney District Council and SIFRE
3:00 pm	Refreshments and time to explore the marketplace
4:00 pm	Depart

# ENGAGEMENT WITH THE POLICE

## Police Diversity Programme Board - 10 September 2009

*Suffolk Constabulary has been working hard over many years on its Diversity Agenda. It has a very committed designated team and also Diversity Champions for the various equality strands. Engagement with the Faith Communities is a high priority, starting with the training of new recruits. The task is ongoing.*

### **Religion and belief Action Plan Update**

This report outlines the work that has been undertaken and provides an update in respect of the Religion and Belief Plan 2009/10.

#### **Update regarding F.1.**

Implement the Constabulary's faith procedure by providing quiet rooms in police premises.

#### **Outcomes**

To meet the religious needs of staff and the wider community.

#### **Actions**

A quiet room was established at both Ipswich Police Station and Police Headquarters in the autumn of last year and this facility was advertised. Unfortunately, due to the pressure on accommodation it was decided in April that the room at Headquarters would have to be used for something else. An alternative room was identified in June and this has been refurbished and is available for use.

However, as the alternative room is situated on the third floor of the training block, it is felt that its location away from reception and main office areas might limit its use. Therefore, plans are in place to monitor the use of this room for the rest of 2009 and a survey will be conducted of staff and visitors to establish what would be the most appropriate location. Diversity Champions will then work with estates staff to seek a more suitable location if necessary. In addition, the availability of the quiet room will be published again on the intranet, with information about the quiet room to be available in reception and on joining instructions for courses.

#### **Update regarding F.2.**

To improve Constabulary attendance at 'Faith Events'.

#### **Outcomes**

To develop and understanding and provide a positive message to members of all communities and staff, that the Constabulary is there for all regardless of

religion and belief.

### **Actions**

Diversity Champions have been working with District Commanders and SNTs to make sure that all SNT profiles and engagement diaries are up to date. This work is now complete, but the Diversity Champions will remind SNTs during the coming twelve months to check that these remain updated.

The Diversity Unit has also added the 'Faith Net East' e bulletin to the Diversity website and has drawn this to the attention of District Commanders so that they can decide who should attend the different events.

### **Update regarding F.3.**

To improve awareness of different faiths amongst all Constabulary staff.

### **Outcomes**

To demonstrate to staff that the Constabulary is aware and sensitive to the needs of its staff, whatever their religion or belief.

### **Actions**

All SNT's were asked to carry out the work in their particular communities to map the different faiths in the county. The recording of these differing groups would be held on the SNT profiles. Each District commander was asked to own this and drive the work forward. The review of the SNT profiles show that this work is still ongoing with little progress made across the county. The information ranges from good (Bury St Edmunds/ Ipswich N/E / Lowestoft Central) to poor the remainder.

A follow up communication has been sent to district Commanders to ensure that the work requested is carried out. I will undertake a further review in November 2009.

### **Update regarding F.4.**

To address faith issues with regards to custody.

### **Outcomes**

Custody provision that is aware and reactive to the religious and spiritual needs of detainees.

### **Actions**

This action has now become part of the custody project with procedures being developed so that custody staff are aware of the requirements of detainees wishing to practice different faiths whilst in custody. This was raised at the custody project board meeting and is still work in action. It links in with the faith mapping to make it relevant and accurate to the communities.

## **Update regarding F.5:**

To ensure best practice in dealing with different faith groups is replicated across the Constabulary.

### **Outcomes**

To improve the service provided across the Constabulary by making sure it instigates best practice at all times when dealing with issues of religion and belief.

### **Actions**

Examples of best practice have been gathered from across the Constabulary and a workshop is being prepared to be held later this year to share this best practice with SNT staff. It is hoped that staff from other forces will also be able to attend to share their experiences and examples of good practice.

## **Police Custody Faith Guides and Faith Boxes**

*This introduces one of six faith guides produced for Suffolk and Norfolk.*

The following guide has been compiled by Inspector Alan Oliver, Custody Inspector Ipswich and Faith Champion Suffolk Constabulary with the assistance of Cynthia Capey from the Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource (SIFRE) under the guidance of Dr Sushil Soni, by whom the contents have been approved. Dr. Soni is willing to be contacted via the Hindu Samaj for further advice.

When in Custody, Hindus may have different needs from non-Hindu detainees regarding, for example, dietary requirements or religious articles. These guidelines have been compiled to ensure that true Hindus are treated with the respect they are due without rumours and anecdotes clouding the issue. It is not our place to judge as to whether people are, or are not, Hindus or how devout they are. If detainees claim to be Hindu they will be treated as such and if they choose to adhere to part of what follows that is acceptable. It will ensure that detainees who claim to be Hindu will not be able to play the system by demanding rights to which they are not entitled at the expense of others.

Please note that the following is not, by any means, an exhaustive guide to any individual Hindu's understanding of his or her belief. Being a Hindu is a deeply personal commitment and each individual will have a unique perspective based on his or her upbringing, tradition and personal or cultural path.

Some Hindus adopt a practical and pragmatic attitude to their faith while others will be very particular about their dharma (religious path). It is therefore very important that Custody staff are aware of such differences and are able to appreciate the wide range of Hindu understandings and practices.

# ENGAGEMENT WITH HOSPITAL CHAPLAINCIES

## West Suffolk Hospital Chaplaincy

*SIFRE has been involved with the development and support of the multi-faith chaplaincy at Ipswich and at West Suffolk Hospital. When the Rev. Canon David Crawley retired in May from his post at West Suffolk Hospital, the following tribute was paid to him by his line manager, Nichole Day:*

“The work of a Chaplain is often misunderstood. People jokingly sometimes refer to David as “The Vicar”! Yet, a hospital is not the same as a parish or a local church and being a Chaplain actually requires a different approach.

A Chaplain offers **spiritual care in its widest sense**, which is about helping people to find meaning and purpose in their individual situation. It may include offering religious care but this cannot be assumed.

In the local church, you would expect a vicar to offer religious care first and foremost.

This distinction lies at the heart of Chaplaincy work and David has worked tirelessly to promote it. Anyone joining the Chaplaincy team is encouraged to be available to all people without any prejudice and to have the ability to offer the wider spiritual care that is required.

What a team he leads! A mix of paid Staff and volunteers (lay and ordained) who come from a wide variety of backgrounds and life experience. Together with David, they offer care not only to patients, relatives and friends but also the Staff too, as many of you will be aware.

As well as developing the Chaplaincy team over 16 years, David has worked with the church communities in our area to develop an agreement with the different faith communities to form a Multi – Faith statement about working together. As a result, the Chapel is dedicated for all people to use, whether of any faith or none. This has meant pain-staking work over a long period of time and the good harmony between various groups and individuals can be attributed directly to David’s leadership and care.

More recently, David has been involved in initiatives to develop spiritual care in Wedgwood House and in providing opportunities to learn about mental health, not only for the Chaplaincy team but for people outside the Hospital community.

David is known for his attention to detail, for being proactive but also for his care for individuals particularly in times of difficulty or ill health. These qualities have been noted and valued by many people and have led to the increased valuing of Chaplaincy work here at West Suffolk. He will be a hard act to follow!

David has always described his time both in the NHS and West Suffolk as a “Journey”, and one thing he would never forgive me for, if I didn’t on his behalf, thank sincerely all those people who have supported and helped him along the way. He has often said without this support and friendship he wouldn’t have been as successful as he has been.

Your contribution to West Suffolk over the years has been relentless, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you most sincerely for all your hard work and input. We wish you all the very best in your onward journey of retirement.

Bon voyage David.

*Nichole Day (Executive Chief Nurse)*

### **The Statement of Commitment of West Suffolk Hospital Chaplaincy Team**

The Department of Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care is a community of people, from different cultural and religious backgrounds, dedicated to spiritual, religious and pastoral care in our Hospitals. It is our aim to respond appropriately and sensitively to the needs of individuals whether they be patients, relatives, visitors or staff, whatever their background, faith or approach to life, and including those who don’t subscribe to any particular tradition.

We are committed to:

- working closely together as a Department and actively developing our understanding and appreciation of each other’s faith and culture.
- helping to foster a greater awareness and understanding of different faiths and cultures throughout our Hospitals and beyond.
- respecting different beliefs and practices and sharing facilities, as far as practical, in a spirit of goodwill and co-operation.

## **ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL CARE SERVICES**

*Senior members of SIFRE have often met together over the years for friendship or as a consultative group for statutory bodies. They were involved in the development of appropriate services for the elderly in Suffolk whether in residential care or at home, and they contributed to the writing of “Culturally Competent Care” published by SCC Social Care Services in partnership with NHS Suffolk and SIFRE in 2003 and recently revised.*

*Details of their contributions can be found in ‘Mostly Memories’*

*SIFRE tutors have led or contributed to many training sessions for Social Care Services, on Faith and Diversity in general or on more specific topics like this:*

### **Supporting Muslim Families**

#### **Preparation**

Do read the Islam packs in advance, and come prepared to ask questions and raise issues. Please come in suitable clothing for the visit to the mosque. You will need to remove your shoes. It would be respectful for women to bring a head covering.

#### **Contributors**

M. Manwar Ali: Chief Executive of Jimas (Muslim educational charity)

Elahe Mojdehi: SIFRE Liaison Officer for Muslims, asylum seekers and refugees

Parul Jalal: Suffolk County Council Foster Care Team, based in Stowmarket.

Cynthia Capey: SIFRE Education and Training Officer

## **Morning session – understanding Islam**

- 09.30**      **Welcome and introduction (Linda James and Cynthia)**  
Impressions of Islam  
Muslim identity and cultural diversity  
Muslims in Suffolk.  
Questions  
**Muslim families**  
Generational and gender issues  
Marriage and roles of husband and wife  
What difference does cultural background make?  
Questions  
**Bringing up children**  
Birth, circumcision, childcare  
Education (home, school, mosque)  
Discipline, play and boundaries  
Questions
- 11.00**      **Coffee**
- 11.30**      **Visit to Bond Street Mosque (with Fotik Miah)**
- 12.30**      **Lunch at Cuppa Café provided by Yildirim family (Kurdish)**

## **Afternoon session – supporting Muslim families**

- 14.00**      **Visiting Muslim homes and      Placing Muslim children**  
What are the guidelines?  
What should we expect from foster families?  
How should we prepare and support them?
- 15:00**      **Buzz groups and feedback for comment and questions**
- 15:30**      **Tea**
- 15:45**      **Professional Implications (Linda James)**  
What difference will it make? Getting further support and advice
- 16.30**      **Depart**

# ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES

## SIFRE Study Circles

In 2008-9 SIFRE introduced local study groups in every borough and district council, on the theme of "Our Shared Stories" with Christian, Jewish and Muslim shared leadership. In 2009-10 the scope was extended to include the insights of the Indic faiths through a series called "East meets West in Suffolk." These local groups have enabled more people in rural Suffolk to engage with people of different faiths, and also triggered a joint initiative between SIFRE and the School of Peace Studies at the Convent of Saint Lioba in Egmond-Binnen, Holland, where we have jointly run two weekend conferences.

### Reflections on an Inter-Faith Liturgy

during the 'Explore Religious Diversity' Meeting  
St Lioba School for Peace, Egmond, May 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> 2011

The inter-faith liturgy was a high point in the inspirational meeting at Egmond. It was planned rather spontaneously just after the art workshop. The involvement in making art brought the participants to a feeling level.

The energy thus generated was astutely guided by Mathilda so that in half an hour we had designed a liturgy where everyone felt involved.

It was held in the chapel of the nuns. This is a very aesthetic and prayerful sacred space. The liturgy opened and closed with the normal prayers of the sisters. This rooted the interfaith experience in the western Christian contemplative tradition.

After the sisters had lit the incense and sung an Easter song, Elahe recited an Islamic prayer in Arabic and English. Next, David chanted a Tibetan Buddhist invocation. Barbara followed with a reading from Gandhi. I then led two bhajans (devotional chants). The first was on a general theme "grace giving light" and everyone joined in. The second was a Christian one that showed how a Hindu practice has enriched Christian devotional practice.

This was followed by a wonderful dance by Michael. He used the whole space of the chapel and related his movements the sacred objects like the sanctuary lamp, the altar, the Easter candle and the baptismal font. Some of his movements reflected the prayer practices we had heard about in the conferences. For example at one moment he sat as in Buddhist meditation.

This sacred dance broke down the invisible barrier that is normally erected in western Christian cultures between the sacred and the profane, the spirit and the body. Coming just after the Hindu prayer form of bhajan singing, an energy was brought into the space that was hospitable to spontaneity and the body.

Hindu temples normally have an area designed for sacred dance. There dance is viewed as a sadhana or spiritual practice.

In India, Christians have begun to develop their own forms of sacred dance. Michael's dance was followed by a Hindu prayer for peace said by Malti who is a practising Hindu. I followed this with a Hindu chant and after this Sr Emmanuelle sang psalm twenty three in Hebrew. It was fascinating to experience the closeness in feel of the Hebrew and the Sanskrit chants.

As Christians we were entering another faith through these chants. The service was concluded with the sisters singing the *Regino Caeli*.

After the service we sat out under the stars and drank wine generously supplied by Jan. Everyone found someone to talk to at a new level of depth and intensity. The liturgy brought us together in a way that respected and celebrated each person's difference. This acceptance of one another's faith journey made communications easier and more meaningful.

*Caroline Mackenzie*

### **Themes for Abrahamic Study Groups**

Each session will include an introduction to topics and texts from the Qur'an and Bible led by a Jew, a Muslim and a Christian, followed by general discussion. This is a great opportunity to share perspectives and deepen understanding.

Introduction: Why we are here. What do we mean by Abrahamic?  
Holy books: Tanakh, Bible, Qur'an – their origin and use.  
How should we treat each other's texts?

What do we mean by "God"? How do we relate to God?  
What is the purpose of life? The end story.

Who was Abraham? How do our texts portray him and his sons? The story behind the Haj.

God's other servants. Prophets and lawgivers.  
Stories of Moses, Jesus and Mohammed.

How do we see the world? The broader picture.  
Creation narratives.

Mankind, sin and forgiveness.  
The story of Adam and Eve.

Children of Abraham – the faith communities.  
Complementary or conflicting stories?

Living in this world – the wider community.  
Stories from the Gospels, the Talmud and the Hadith.

## **Themes for East meets West in Suffolk in Pursuit of Shared Values for a Cohesive Society**

Topics for consideration, not necessarily in order.

What do we mean by a good life? What is the aim of life and its goal?  
Dharma, Sharia, Tao,...

From where do we derive our values? Prophets, gurus, avatars; philosophers,  
texts, mythology....

What is a family? What are our family values? Who are our neighbours?

What is a community? What are our significant communities?

What is a faith community? How do we relate to our own if we have one and  
to others?

The world of work. Professional lives. What are our business ethics?

What is our relationship to nature. The interconnectedness of life.

What do we mean by being a British citizen? What can people of faith  
contribute to the body politic?

## **SIFRE'S PROGRAMME FOR 2010 – 2011**

*In 2010 and 2011 we moved into a new relationship with SCC. Instead of receiving core funding to support our work we were required to deliver a programme through a Service Level Agreement administered by EEFA. We decided to link this programme explicitly to the Community Cohesion Agenda.*

The theme for the SIFRE programme for this year is “Belonging”. It is a simple word to describe a human need which has more significance to most of us than terms like social or community cohesion, which have their origin in government departments.

The study groups in various locations around Suffolk, the Faith and Culture seminars and the Forums of Faith in Ipswich, Bury St. Edmunds, Lowestoft and Eye offer everyone opportunities to look at diversity and faith – what makes us different, how we can use these differences to keep others at arm’s length and reinforce misunderstandings or how we can build an enriched society based on our shared wisdom and commitment to the good of all.

There are many different voices to be heard and models of community to be explored – including the experiences of maritime students at Lowestoft College who must work together as a team on their ships although they are part of multi-cultural crews. Other people will share their views on the role of faith in the workplace and in the public sphere, both of which can be difficult areas to negotiate in the light of human rights, equality legislation and freedom of speech.

It is possible to join courses on a regular basis in your own locality or to attend single events which fit better with your work/life balance as an individual. We have varied the timings of events in order to meet different needs. If you can’t spare much time in the normal course of events, you may be able link in with something during the national Inter-Faith Week (November 21-27th). More details about the week will be available in the Autumn.

We hope that this ambitious programme will bring together people from all walks of life to listen to each other and explore what it means fully to belong to our society. Whether we are councillors or officers, community leaders or asylum seekers, can we take the time to think more deeply about what kind of society we want and whether we are laying the right foundations?

*Cynthia Capey, Hon SIFRE Faiths Officer and Faiths Representative on SCC Strategic Partnership, Community Cohesion and Inclusion Strategic Board*

## **STUDY GROUP TOPICS**

### **“Building Community – Us and Them?”**

The topics have been chosen to help participants explore how faith groups and individuals can distance themselves from or alienate others, often unintentionally, and to consider how safer and stronger communities can emerge if we understand each other better, show respect for each other and draw on our core values as human beings.

Myths of origin – do they define us as separate from or connected to the rest of humanity? Can we interpret the religious stories we have inherited in the light of modern knowledge?

Theological language - are concepts like polytheism, pantheism, monotheism, unitarianism and trinitarianism generally understood? What problems can they cause within and between faith groups?

Terms of alienation – what do terms like pagan, gentile, kaffir, giorgio and heathen really mean and what impact do they have? How can we define other people in ways which shows respect?

Traditional attitudes - what are our inherited views on gender roles, sexual orientation, age and race? How can we deal with our preconditioning so that we can respond to others appropriately?

Inherited cultures – does our religious music bring harmony or discordance? Can we appreciate each others’ art forms and icons? Can we affirm each others’ traditions in the public sphere?

“The Home we Build Together” – what should it be like? The Chief Rabbi’s recent book with this title invites us to consider what sort of society/ies we are recreating, here and further afield?

## **INTER-FAITH WEEK IN SUFFOLK 2010**

*We cannot illustrate all the year's activities, but it is worth high-lighting the events of this one week, a government initiative which is in its second year.*

**Saturday 20 November 2010 at 7:00pm**

**St Margaret's Church Lowestoft**

**Dinner and Diversity**

Lowestoft and Waveney SIFRE Circle (SIFRE being Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource) hosted a social evening at St. Margaret's Church in Lowestoft, to mark the eve of Interfaith Week.

20 members and guests, including Councillor Dack, Mayor of the town, and his wife, and Peter Aldous, the newly elected constituency MP, sat down together to share a meal, followed by a session with the SIFRE originated board game, Diversity. There were people in the groups from many different faiths, and some without a particular allegiance, and everyone took part wholeheartedly in sharing and learning about our various traditions and practices. As guests left, several commented on what an interesting evening it had been. Councillor Dack was particularly pleased, and remarked that although "you hear about all these different faiths, you don't often get a chance to learn about them". Once again, Circle members cooperated happily and with minimum prompting to produce and serve a lovely meal, and enable people to communicate with each other freely about things that are important to them, but are rarely spoken of.

Thanks to Captain Paul and St. Margaret's for use of their facilities – the room was just the right size venue, and everything we needed was there for us. We look forward to doing it again next year.

*Rose Norgate – SIFRE Circle Co-ordinator in Lowestoft and Waveney*

**Monday 22 November 2010 from 9:00am -5:00pm**

**Endeavour House, Ipswich**

**County Launch of Inter-Faith Week**

Faith groups and schools, Suffolk Police, Suffolk Prisons, Hospital Chaplaincies and faith representatives on Local Strategic Partnerships set up an exhibition of their inter-faith work in the atrium of Endeavour House, the County Council headquarters in Suffolk. There were displays of RE in schools representing primary, middle and secondary, faith schools, state schools, special schools, town and rural schools. The children enjoyed the opportunity to be dressed in

saris or turbans, and to talk to the people on the faiths stalls as well as launching paper aeroplanes from the top balcony of the building! At lunch time, Inter-Faith Week in Suffolk was formally launched by the Suffolk County Council portfolio holder for Sport, Culture, Diversity, Health and Wellbeing, and there was a short concert by a mixed age children's choir of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This event was open to the public and was well attended.

The special display of the work of LSP Faith Reps. moved around the county during the week to venues linking up with the other events.

**Monday 22 November 2010 7.30pm**

**St Pancras RC Church, Ipswich**

**A Jewish Perspective on the book of Exodus**

An open evening to hear Rabbi Elkan Levy, Director of Small Communities.

**Tuesday 23 November 2010 from 1:00pm -2:15pm**

**SIFRE Centre, Ipswich**

**Ipswich Locality Study Group - Building Community**

"Them and us" A study group on the theme of 'Terms of alienation – gentile, kaffir, pagan, giorgio, migrant, alien, refugee. . . . '

**Wednesday 24 November 2010 from 3:30pm**

**Ipswich Hospital - Reflections**

An inter-faith act of worship based on the work of the multi-faith chaplaincy at Ipswich Hospital.

**Some Reflections on 'Reflections'**

Since working at SIFRE I have learnt so much about different faiths. I was the Admin Assistant then Assistant to the Faiths Officer and since last week I have become the Resources Officer.

Although I have studied at University for a degree in Religious Studies and Classical Studies until I came to work at SIFRE I am ashamed to say I knew very little about faiths other than Christianity, Judaism and Islam. I knew nothing about the Baha'i faith, for example. I have now met Baha'is and am constantly meeting members of all the other faith communities in Suffolk.

I continue to learn and I believe you should never stop learning

I have always been interested in Paganism, its respect for nature and its attitude to relationships but since working at SIFRE, I have learnt more from reading the books, talking to Pagans and attending SIFRE study groups and Forums of Faith.

The word pagan covers native peoples from many countries and I would like to share with you 2 short readings from a little resource book of wisdom from Canada's First Nations.

The first reading I would like to share is entitled "Open Spirituality."

Most Native people "don't care whose God it is." In fact, most Native people are open to everyone's God. They eagerly believe that they have much to learn from anyone who is spiritual and in touch with the spiritual realm. Theirs is an open spiritual system.

An open spiritual system recognizes that there is one God and Creator of us all and that each of us has groped as best we can to understand a mystery that is bigger than all of us.

Most Native people believe that we have a better possibility of coming to know the Creator of us all if we share our teaching.

The thought underneath is: We need as broad a spiritual base as possible if we are to live spiritual lives.

The second reading I would like to share is titled "Recognition That We Don't Have To Be Alike / Respect For All Religions."

One of the ways to have peace on this planet is to recognize one another's differences and to respect and guard them. Nothing is more supportive of peace than the recognition that all religions are important. What is important is that the spiritual life be lived in a way that is "correct" for every person within his or her culture. We do not need to be the same. Wakan-Tanka (the Creator, the Great Spirit) is mysterious beyond our comprehension. By our very existence each of us adds new dimensions to our understanding of the mystery.

The thought underneath is: There are many paths to Wakan-Tanka. Each of us must find our way. My search is enhanced when I value and respect others on their way.

*Anna-Marie Allbones*

**Wednesday 24 November 2010 from 7:00pm –9:30pm**

**BSE Forum of Faiths**

**Friends' Meeting House, Bury St Edmunds**

“Where are we now?” – Amadee Turner presented his report on “Islam and Democracy” – recent soundings” summarising the Muslim/Christian round table discussions he has been co-ordinating internationally (including a series in Ipswich and in Bury St. Edmunds.)

**Thursday 25 November 2010 from 12:00pm –2:00pm**

**Waveney Forum of Faiths**

**Town Hall, Lowestoft**

“What can we offer the community?” members of the Waveney SIFRE Circle share some key principles of their faiths.

**Thursday 25 November 2010 from 7:00pm -8:15pm**

**Bealings Locality Study Group - Building Community**

**Angela Cobbold Memorial Hall, Little Bealings**

The theological language we use – polytheism, pantheism, monotheism, trinitarianism. Are these terms generally understood? What problems can they cause within and between faith groups?

**Saturday 27 November 2010 at 11:00am and 2:00pm**

**Pilgrimage Tours of Ipswich**

In conjunction with Suffolk Constabulary

**Sunday 28 November 2010 at 12:00pm**

**‘Sharing Mary’ (Bible and Qur’an side by side)**

**St Mary-le-Tower Church, Ipswich.**

*SIFRE hosted the UK launch of this groundbreaking and scholarly book. The Dutch author, Marlies ter Borg, gave a presentation on the background to the book and illustrated how the Virgin Mary is depicted in the Bible and the Qur’an and in art. (The English version of the book, which gives parallel passages from the Qur’an and the Bible is available from Amazon).*

## SUFFOLK – A FAITH PROFILE 2011

The religious make-up of Suffolk is diverse and changing, and while it is possible to gain an overall view, it is easy to stereotype the various groups, or confuse culture with faith. The census for 2001 listed 494,608 Christians in Suffolk but that total encompasses members of numerous Christian denominations, including Anglican (Church of England), Baptist, Christadelphian, Christian Scientist, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Congregational, German Lutheran, Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Celtic Orthodox, Independent Pentecostal, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Salvation Army, Society of Friends (Quakers), Seventh-day Adventist, Unitarian, United Reformed Church, several black led churches both Trinitarian and Unitarian, and Independent and House Churches. There are also members of eastern Churches like Syrian Orthodox, Copts and Armenians among the asylum seekers and refugees in Suffolk. Migrant workers from Poland and Portugal have swelled the numbers of Roman Catholics.

Alongside these diverse Christian groups there are Baha'is (perhaps 40), Buddhists (1,155), Hindus (2000), Humanists, Jains, Jews (700), Muslims (5:000), Pagans (600), Sikhs (400), Taoists and Zoroastrians. These figures are not accurate, and they omit the statistics of some faiths while underestimating others. Significantly they do not show the different paths within each faith. There are several strands of Buddhism in Suffolk - Triratna Buddhists, Tibetan Buddhists, SGI Buddhists and various others, who may or may not meet regularly. Muslims in Suffolk, originally mostly from Bangladesh, now come from all around the world and include significant numbers of Kurds, Iraqis and Afghans.

The greatest diversity of faiths is found in Ipswich, which has many religious buildings including, alongside Churches, 3 Mosques, a Sikh Gurdwara and a Buddhist Centre. The Hindu Samaj has obtained charitable status and has established a Mandir. The Suffolk Jewish Community meets regularly and celebrates its festivals, often in Salvation Army premises or other community centres. There is an Ipswich Pagan Council representing the many Pagan paths followed in the county. People from minority faiths can be found throughout the county. In Mid-Suffolk alone the 2001 census recorded 104 Buddhists, 97 Muslims, 57 Jews and 7 Sikhs.

In Lowestoft, Bury St. Edmunds and Newmarket, sizeable groups of Muslims meet for Friday prayer; there is at least one Mosque within the racing stables at Newmarket and groups of Muslims meet in other towns especially during Ramadan. An Ipswich and Suffolk Muslim Council has been formed and is making progress. Other faith groups may hire rooms when needed or meet in members' homes. Hindus, Buddhist and Sikhs may well have family shrines or

prayer rooms within their houses. Lowestoft has a significant number of refugees, migrant workers and maritime students from overseas, who are changing its religious profile, and Bury St. Edmunds (where the newly built tower of the Cathedral has been described as a spiritual beacon for the new millennium) is also becoming more diverse.

A wide representation of faiths is also to be found in the prisons and hospitals, and also within BT which frequently receives personnel on short contracts from overseas. People from many different faiths and cultures, speaking a great variety of languages, work in Suffolk factories. It is easy to overlook this group and their needs often go unmet, especially as they are transported daily to factories in rural Suffolk and make no contact with the local community.

## **SIFRE'S ACTIVITIES AROUND SUFFOLK**

*Although SIFRE's base is in Ipswich, we have always endeavoured to deliver a county wide service, often working at grass roots level, particularly in rural areas. This has included providing speakers for WEA groups, various Church groups, youth clubs, old people's homes and a long list of schools. In recent years we have become more involved in formal structures, giving advice, raising awareness and providing training for the statutory and voluntary bodies including education service, health service, police and social care services. We have done our best to respond creatively to various government initiatives and welcomed the opportunity to become involved with the County Social Cohesion agenda at all levels. Some of our recent work has therefore been designed to support the pattern of the local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and also to highlight the Government White Paper "Face to Face and Side by Side" which sets out guidelines to encourage local authorities to work constructively with faith communities.*

### **SIFRE in Ipswich**

As stated earlier, the beginnings of Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource can be traced back to the annual Celebrations of Community held by Ipswich Mayors since the early 1980s in the Unitarian Meeting House and to the outreach work of the Religious Studies Department of Suffolk College in Ipswich. SIFRE was launched as a county network of faiths in 1991 in the presence of the then Mayor, Councillor Ken Wilson. It was formally constituted as a charitable company in 1994 under the patronage of Suffolk College. SIFRE's acceptance into membership of the Interfaith Network UK was negotiated on the basis that Ipswich at the end of the 20th century was multi-faith in its constituency. Thus, although SIFRE has always seen its role as a resource for the whole county, Ipswich has been its seed-bed and launch-pad.

Ipswich has, therefore, been for many years the main focus of SIFRE's activities and a rich resource for the rest of the county and beyond. Good relationships have been built with churches and other faith groups based in the town. We work in partnership with them to arrange for visits from schools, police and other organisations. We have a team of tutors drawn from those faith communities who are regular visitors to schools, church and voluntary groups and who work together to deliver faith diversity training, to lead inter-faith study groups and to arrange regular Forums of Faith. The compiling of our various books has helped to bring together people from the various faith communities in Ipswich and created relationships of trust.

The interaction of SIFRE with the life of the town is ever-changing, reflecting the changing needs and aspirations of the faith communities themselves and the requests we receive to support the statutory and voluntary bodies in their work. For example, we were involved in the development of multi-faith provision at Ipswich Hospital, St. Clements and the Hospices, and we galvanised early efforts to provide appropriate and holistic support for asylum seekers and refugees. It has been a great privilege to provide speakers from different faiths and backgrounds to open Ipswich Borough Council meetings with Prayers or a Thought for the Day. We were pleased to support the work of Rev. Canon Paul Daltry as Faith Representative on the Ipswich Local Strategic Partnership.

### **SIFRE in West Suffolk including St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath**

SIFRE's team of tutors has visited schools to enhance their RE programme and run 6th form conferences and other events in various venues including Mildenhall, Bury, Thurston, Brandon, Newmarket and Haverhill. In partnership with the WEA, we have provided courses on faith and culture in various venues, including Haverhill and Hargrave and we have delivered Diversity training for Borough Council staff and offered Faith and Culture seminars in Bury in co-operation with the Borough and the County Council. We have worked closely with the Chaplain on the development of the Multi-faith Chaplaincy at West Suffolk hospital.

The Faces of Suffolk Exhibition, developed by SIFRE in partnership with the Racial Harassment Initiative of Suffolk County Council, visited Bury in 2003 and was displayed in the Cathedral and Manor House Museum. The exhibition also visited Forest Heath and was on display in the Foyer of the Council Offices in Mildenhall. SIFRE Diversity training through the Diversity game was delivered to new staff of the Council some time ago and it was proposed that it should be included in staff induction.

In 2004 we held four open sessions of Christian/Muslim Dialogue on Democracy, Human Rights, Justice and Consumerism at the Cathedral. This was part of a world-wide network of round table discussions, set up by Amedee Turner on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury's representative at the UN.

In 2004 we appointed Liz Pichon as Hon. Faiths Officer to co-ordinate activities in West Suffolk and to nurture a SIFRE study Circle. Liz facilitated a programme of events for the public while also strengthening links with the statutory and voluntary sectors through events like the Bury "Questions of Identity, Faith and Culture" conference, the Bury Festival of Culture and several "Harvests of

People". Liz piloted the new University of Cambridge HE Certificate in Supporting Diversity and Equality at West Suffolk College, organised a Festival of Light for students, and took the St Edmundsbury Youth Council to St. Ethelburga's Centre in the City of London where they met young people from a variety of inner city London schools.

We have facilitated the community placements of student police in West Suffolk and we have been contracted to deliver police training in Bury and also in Newmarket, with particular reference to dealing with Muslims. We involved a wide range of representatives from the local community including district and council staff. We have SIFRE representation on the Equality Board at Highpoint Prison, and on the Independent Advisory Group and we have delivered faith awareness training to prison staff.

SIFRE tutors from the faiths to support RE are always in great demand from schools and have been regular visitors to Mildenhall College of Technology. SIFRE facilitated a visit of pupils from Riverside Middle School to a Mosque and to the Sikh Gurdwara in Ipswich. This was a memorable and mind-blowing event for both staff and pupils and the school is hoping to build the experience into the curriculum. SIFRE worked with excluded pupils in Newmarket through the medium of the SIFRE Diversity game. These sessions were useful and so were others which were delivered to pupils in Brandon and to members of a youth club in Mildenhall. SIFRE has also worked with ISCRE on community events for young people.

In 2008/2009 SIFRE initiated county-wide monthly study groups which are open to all. The St. Edmundsbury and Forest Heath group, based in Bury, continues to meet in the Friends' Meeting House. The theme in 2010-11 was "Building Community – Them and Us", and was designed along with the rest of SIFRE's current programme to support Suffolk's Community Cohesion agenda. The overall programme has included Forums of Faith in Bury and Newmarket, as well as Faith and Culture seminars and Religious Literacy training in Bury.

Liz Pichon has moved away from Suffolk to take on other challenges, while other people are coming forward to help build on SIFRE's work in Bury and West Suffolk. We were pleased to support the work of David Hussell, as Faith Representative on the West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership. We are looking forward to responding to new opportunities.

### **SIFRE in Babergh**

Over the years, SIFRE has delivered 10 week WEA courses on "World religions Roundabout" in various centres including Capel St Mary, Sudbury and Stoke by Nayland. Representatives of different faiths have given talks at sessions in

Tattingstone Church, open to the general public, and in 2010 SIFRE was invited to provide speakers for a Lent Course in Lavenham Church. This involved Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Pagan and Sikh speakers. The course was supported by West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership as it was open to all and was dispelling misconceptions about minority groups. It attracted about 40 people.

The "Faces of Suffolk" exhibition visited Hadleigh in 2003. An Islamic Awareness evening was held at the request of Churches Together in Hadleigh, and Diversity training through the SIFRE Diversity game was delivered to a Babergh tenants' association and also to a group of Church members. SIFRE participated in the Babergh Uniting Cultures Youth Conference.

When, in 2008/2009, SIFRE ran Abrahamic study groups on the theme of "Shared Stories" on a monthly basis in every borough and district of Suffolk, and each group was jointly led by a Jew, a Muslim and a Christian, the Babergh group met in Bentley Village Hall. In 2010/2011 a locality study group entitled "Building Community" was held monthly in the public library in Hadleigh, with Buddhist, Humanist, Christian and Muslim input.

We are pleased to be working with Chris Yule, the Faith Representative on the Babergh Local Strategic Partnership.

### **SIFRE in Mid-Suffolk**

In partnership with the WEA, SIFRE has given 10 week courses with input from representatives of the faiths found in Suffolk in various centres including Eye. SIFRE tutors from the faiths are always in great demand from schools to support RE and SIFRE was also involved in a "Mingle" Conference at Debenham High. The "Faces of Suffolk" exhibition visited Stowmarket in 2003 and was on display at the Museum of East Anglian Life.

A training session with the SIFRE Diversity game for Mid-Suffolk District Councillors usefully highlighted the difficulties that some people, especially in rural Suffolk, may have in engaging with other world views or with relating to people of other faiths. We have been able to build upon that experience.

In 2007, a week long Festival of Faiths was held in Occold Church. Local schools, church and chapel members, people working in the area, police, councillors and the general public were invited to attend to meet in turn on different days – Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, Pagans and members of the Travelling community, including the Romany Theatre. It was a memorable series of events.

The 2008/2009 SIFRE Abrahamic study groups for Mid-Suffolk on the theme of "Shared Stories", jointly led by a Jew, a Muslim and a Christian, met in the hall

of Christchurch, Needham Market. The two final sessions considered how those particular faiths relate to the wider community and whether their stories and traditions are complementary or contradictory.

In 2009/2010 study groups were held in Eye Church on the theme of East meets West in Suffolk. SIFRE has delivered Religious Literacy training at Kerrison and we hope to arrange a Forum of Faith entitled “Faith in my factory” to consider the experiences and needs of migrant workers.

We were pleased to support the work of Revd. Carol Mansell as Faith Representative on the Mid-Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership.

### **SIFRE in Suffolk Coastal**

A SIFRE Circle met for several years in Woodbridge and SIFRE continues to support various groups in the district who wish to become more informed about other faiths and cultures. We have provided speakers and arranged visits to places of worship for Church groups, youth clubs, old people’s homes, the WEA, WI and a long list of schools (primary, middle and upper). We were particularly thrilled when Woodbridge Choral Society asked us to find a Muslim to chant the call to prayer in their performance of “The Armed Man”.

A WEA 10 week course on Islam at Dunwich and Westleton attracted over 50 people. We have also run WEA courses on “World Religions Roundabout” in Framlingham, Brandeston and Felixstowe. The monthly Monday evening talks at St. Mary’s, Woodbridge 2009/2010 included 5 SIFRE speakers (Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh). More SIFRE speakers have been booked for their 2010/2011 series.

A strong partnership has been developed with the Suffolk Police. The new training programme for police recruits includes Community placements, arranged by SIFRE, and SIFRE facilitates their faith awareness training. SIFRE has good links with HMPS Hollesley Bay and Warren Hill. The “Faces of Suffolk” exhibition visited Leiston in 2003, and an Islamic Awareness exhibition was displayed in the Unitarian Meeting House in Framlingham. Diversity training through the SIFRE Diversity game has been delivered to Stonham Housing staff in Framlingham, and to students at Otley College. Inter-Faith days led by SIFRE tutors have been recently included within the Otley Hall programme.

The 2008/2009 the Abrahamic study group for Suffolk Coastal on the theme of “Shared Stories”, jointly led by a Jew, a Muslim and a Christian, met in Little Bealings and continued with a membership of over 20 in 2009/2010 on the theme of “East meets West in Suffolk” to include the insights of the Indian religions. In 2010/2011 a further series on the theme of “Building Community – Them and Us” was held, designed along with the rest of SIFRE’s current

programme to support Suffolk's Community Cohesion agenda.

We were pleased to support the work of Julie Mansfield as Faith Representative on the Suffolk Coastal Local Strategic Partnership.

### **SIFRE in Waveney**

SIFRE's work in Waveney has included creating a SIFRE Circle of people of different faiths who respect each other and identifying tutors from the faiths to visit local schools and other organisations, and address meetings of churches, secular organisations and inter-agency groups. Members of the Waveney SIFRE Circle presented a course in the library in Lowestoft on the various faiths, and SIFRE tutors delivered WEA courses in Southwold on "Islam in the Modern World" and on "What do the Faiths teach about Justice?" In 2004 we were delighted to appoint Rose Norgate as Hon. Faiths Officer to co-ordinate SIFRE's work in Waveney.

Over the years, we have run open seminars on "What do the Faiths teach about Education?" (Adult Learners' Week); and on "What do the Faiths teach about Refugees?" (Refugee Week) and on "What do the Faiths teach about Sexual Orientation?". We have delivered lunch-time seminars for the County Council and District Council, run Diversity workshops for SAVO and for Stonham Housing and contributed to the Festival of Culture.

We have worked with Lowestoft College and the Waveney Community Cohesion Partnership, to provide annual conferences in the College open to all

2005: "Questions of Identity, Faith and Culture"

2006: "Waveney – Richer for Diversity" (included the formal launch of Waveney Community Cohesion Partnership).

2007: "Waveney – our Shared Values"

2008: "Your Town, My Town, Our Town".

We have been running monthly study groups since 2008/2009 in Beccles, and our current programme also includes well-supported Forums of Faith, Faith Awareness/Religious Literacy training and Faith and Culture Seminars. The Lowestoft SIFRE Circle continues to meet regularly and links with the Muslim community are being strengthened. SIFRE was commissioned through the Prevent Strategy to run a project for Muslim Women in Lowestoft and we hope to build on this work. A separate report is available. We have delivered a training day for Police.

We were pleased to support the work of Capt. Paul Macdonough, as Faith Representative on the Waveney LSP.

A very interesting seminar on the theme of community cohesion was recently led by Lowestoft College's overseas maritime students. The 26 students included Hindus, Muslims, Christian, and one Parsee and one Sikh. This was probably similar to the make-up of a crew. 3 or 4 made the initial responses to the questions but they all joined in the discussion. It was emphasised that they are seamen first and foremost, and they bring who they are to their life together as crew. Their faith, while crucial to who they are, is private and something on which they draw on a daily basis, particularly connected with their family and upbringing. Photos of their families maintain a sense of connection.

The lovely story told by the Parsee (Zoroastrian) sums up the message of the Forum.

When the Zoroastrians first fled to India, the ruler said they were not welcome to stay. Their leader asked for some milk and sugar and slowly added the sugar to the milk. "This is how we will be among your people" he said. We will not overwhelm you or do you any harm. Our presence among you will enhance your community."

*I hope this rough outline of SIFRE's work illustrates its role within the government's Face to Face and Side by Side agenda and demonstrates its contribution to social cohesion and inclusion in Waveney and in every other part of Suffolk. The changing agendas of government have involved us in adapting to new ways of delivering our services, including supporting the work of Faith Representatives on Local Strategic Partnerships. We will continue to do our best to work with local government, whatever form it takes!*

*Cynthia Capey,*

*Hon. Faiths Officer and Vice-Chair of Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource and Faith Representative on SCC Community Cohesion and Inclusion Delivery Board.*

## **SIFRE MOVES ON.**

2010 presented SIFRE with many fresh challenges. We did not know whether Suffolk County Council and/or District Councils would become Unitary Authorities and we awaited the outcome of a General Election. More significantly, SIFRE learnt at the end of January that its core funding from Suffolk County Council was to be replaced by funding through Service Level Agreements. When the Board met to discuss this change, it decided that it did not want to go down this route. It resolved to move forward without seeking or accepting restrictive funding and to be guided by SIFRE's Aims and Objectives as specified in its Memorandum. The Board agreed that as of April 1st, SIFRE would cease most of its financial activities and become a wholly voluntary inter-faith group – it would in effect return to its roots and its administrative activities would diminish.

Since 2001, the East of England Faiths Agency (EEFA) which was nurtured by SIFRE and is now a free standing Community Interest Company, has been offering teaching / training out of county, within the East of England Region and further afield. From April 1st EEFA took over this provision within Suffolk also. It intends to employ those tutors who were previously used by SIFRE to deliver the teaching / training and thus consolidate the regional provision of this service. It will also handle the sale of the Diversity Game and the Handbook of Faiths and other publications for SIFRE. As a Community Interest Company, EEFA is required to plough back any trading profit it makes into the development of the Company and it will donate a percentage of any profit, proportional to the number of Suffolk based assignments it takes on, to SIFRE.

Over the years, SIFRE's range of activities and involvements has been increasing. Besides running an extensive teaching and training programme, running study groups and organising Forum of Faiths meetings, its staff were serving on some 18 interagency committees. They have found it increasingly challenging to attend to all of these commitments. From now on, SIFRE will concentrate on nurturing its study groups and further developing its Forum of Faiths. It will continue to be a membership organisation and it will foster the growth of its Faith Officer Team. It will endeavour to have a presence in County, District and other sector committees and panels when requested and it will continue to offer support to the Faith Representatives serving on Local Strategic Partnerships. It hopes to be able to provide volunteer speakers to voluntary groups who have little or no funds. (These groups – churches, cubs, scouts, etc - have previously been subsidised by SIFRE.)

Its reduced administrative control will remain in the hands of its Board but the Board can become more representative of the mix of faiths which make up the membership because none of them will be employees of SIFRE (Charity Law

and SIFRE's Memorandum and Articles preclude employees from becoming Trustee Directors of SIFRE). Hopefully the general activities of SIFRE will become increasingly responsive to the will of the members and associates and affiliate groups of SIFRE who attend the Forums of Faiths.

The change that took place on 1st April 2010 will let both SIFRE and EEFA consolidate their activities. The Board of SIFRE see all of this as a liberating step and they feel confident that this will ensure the ongoing existence of an organisation with a 20 year track record.

## **THANKS TO SUFFOLK NEW COLLEGE**

Suffolk College played a major role in SIFRE's early development. It made premises available, allowed Cynthia some research time to explore the religious map of Ipswich and Suffolk, and eventually seconded her on a half time basis so she could nurture and guide the emerging SIFRE. In 1996 when Cynthia took early retirement, the College continued to provide premises and to support her in an ongoing voluntary role within SIFRE. Although Suffolk College is no longer our landlord, it continues to be supportive and hospitable to our activities.

### **AN APPRECIATION FROM SUFFOLK NEW COLLEGE**

At Suffolk New College we are delighted to have been involved with SIFRE at its conception in 1991 and to be involved with the 20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary celebrations. Cynthia who was employed as a full time lecturer was seconded on a half time basis to set it up in its accommodation in a classroom in T block. For many years we provided accommodation in various forms and locations from wooden huts to numerous classrooms and then finally the Caretaker's Bungalow on Grimwade Street! Over the years the SIFRE Team have continued to provide access and knowledge about the wide range of faiths across Suffolk to the college and our students and most recently offering support to our Centre for Equality & Diversity. We wish SIFRE well and look forward to continuing to work with them.

*Professor Dave Muller  
Principal, Suffolk New College, Ipswich*

## **THANKS TO UNIVERSITY CAMPUS SUFFOLK**

The self-contained premises provided by Suffolk College at its Bolton Lane site for SIFRE alongside the Religious Studies courses gave an incredible opportunity for outreach, for team-building and for developing an innovative programme. Later on those premises were replaced by other spaces including the easily accessible and hospitable “Caretaker’s Bungalow” in Grimwade Street. Eventually those premises disappeared with the land exchanges necessitated by the arrival of University Campus Suffolk. SIFRE was then housed in the Long Street Building as a tenant of UCS.

In the summer of 2011 we are to be transferred into a suite of rooms on the 1st floor of UCS West Building. We will be able to house our extensive library there, to hold meetings and to run an educational programme in premises which will be accessible to all. SIFRE is an educational charity and the hospitality of firstly Suffolk College and now of UCS in an academic atmosphere is a perpetual reminder of our primary role. This generous support gives us security and a base from which we can reach out to the rest of the county.

We are delighted that SIFRE is working with UCS to provide an annual high profile speaker on faith. Lord Harries of Pentregarth gave the inaugural lecture on 15th January 2010 on the subject “Christianity and Islam in the Modern World”.

### **AN APPRECIATION FROM UNIVERSITY CAMPUS SUFFOLK**

UCS is pleased to be hosting SIFRE on our campus, continuing and building upon the close association forged between SIFRE and Suffolk College.

We were delighted to have worked closely with SIFRE in launching our Annual Faith Lecture in 2010 when Richard Harries (Lord Harries of Pentregarth, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Interfaith Group) delivered an excellent lecture to a large audience drawn from across Suffolk and beyond.

We are pleased to support the diverse faith communities in Suffolk, in no small part through our continuing association with SIFRE.

*Sarah Meelan, Director of Human Resources , UCS*

## APPENDIX 1 - SIFRE FORUM OF FAITHS MEETINGS

03 Dec 2003	Special Meeting of new Forum of Faiths
03 Sept 2004	What do the Faiths teach about Justice?
24 Feb 2005	What do the Faiths teach about Democracy and Citizenship?
07 April 2005	What do the Faiths teach about Health?
10 Oct 2005	Perspectives on Multi-Faith Chaplaincy
11 Oct 2006	Death, Dying and Disaster
21 Jan 2007	Provision of Places of Worship and Chaplaincy in Ipswich and Suffolk
16 Oct 2007	Living in a Secular society
15 Nov 2007	Every Child Matters
14 Feb 2008	Wise Words, Bad Press!
21 Feb 2008	Winter Pilgrimage - Gaza and the West Bank
28 Feb 2008	Winter Pilgrimage - Social Cohesion, Andalucian Style
08 July 2008	Caring for the Elderly
22 Oct 2008	What is the Forum of Faiths For?
10 Feb 2009	The Impact of the Credit Crunch on the Faith Communities of Suffolk and their Members
06 May 2009	What do <u>we</u> mean by Community Cohesion?
21 Oct 2009	Initial Encounters
28 Oct 2009	Initial Encounters (Lowestoft)
15 Nov 2009	Harvest of People (BSE)
16 Feb 2010	Be my Guest
11 May 2010	What on Earth are YOU doing?
18 May 2010	What on Earth are YOU doing (Newmarket)?
20 May 2010	What on Earth are YOU doing (Lowestoft)?
08 March 2011	Embracing the Other
07 June 2011	Exploring Spirituality transcending difference through art, calligraphy and sculpture, an inner and an outer journey

## APPENDIX 2 – SIFRE PUBLICATIONS

The following can be purchased on application to [office@eefa.net](mailto:office@eefa.net)

**Diversity - The Game** - This has been devised and developed by members and friends of Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource. It is intended as a teaching and training game for almost all sections of our society; from primary school children to professionals working for the statutory bodies concerned with the welfare and care of our multi-faith and multi-cultural community. The game invites each of its players to assume the identity of someone from a different faith section of society and to undertake various Challenges that such a person might meet in daily dealings with fellow members of an ill informed world.  
Price - £30.00 plus £5:00 p&p

**Diversity - The Game Playing Mat** – This mat (3ft x 3ft) is ideal for occasions when up to 12 people are playing the game as part of a training session. The mat rolls up and slips into a cardboard carrying tube.  
Price - £27.50 plus £5:00 p&p

**A Handbook of Faiths** (Revised Fourth Edition) (ISBN 1 902360 10 9) (*previously called 'An Inter-Faith Handbook for Community Use'*)  
This handbook includes information about the beliefs, practices and needs of many of the religious and cultural groups found in Suffolk. Besides outlining beliefs, it deals with attitudes to various aspects of life and death, including diet, festivals and rites of passage. It is recommended background reading for anyone working in our Multi-Cultural, Multi-Faith Community.  
Price - £5:95 plus 50p p&p

**Sacred Spaces, Special Places** – An anthology of prose and poetry provided by SIFRE members and others.  
Price - 3.50 plus 50p p&p

**Pagan Pieces** – Insightful writings on various topics by our Pagan members.  
Price - £3.50 plus 50p p&p)

**Children of Abraham** - Christian, Jewish and Muslim interpretations of the story of Abraham's offering of his son as a sacrifice.  
Price - £3.50 plus 50p p&p)

**The Jews** - Perspectives on Jews and Judaism compiled by Alex Bennett from contributions by Jewish members and friends of SIFRE. - by Alex Bennett  
Price - Price - £3.50 plus 50p p&p

**Faith Resources - Set of 12 Unlaminated Faith Posters**  
Informative illustrated A3 posters for display and study purposes.  
(£18 .00 plus £4.00 p&p)

**Faith resources - Set of 12 Faith Cards (£3.50 plus £1.00 p&p)**

As used in the Diversity Game.

**Faiths in Focus 1994**

SIFRE's first publication – a few copies remain and are available (free of charge)

**The religious history of Ipswich.**

A short guide to Ipswich's places of worship with a set of accompanying photographs

**What do the faiths teach about .....?**

The papers presented at SIFRE and EEFA Forum of Faith Meetings.

.... **Death Dying and Disaster?** (£3.50 plus 50p p&p)

.... **Democracy?** (£3.50 plus 50p p&p)

.... **Gambling?** (£3.50 plus 50p p&p)

.... **Justice?**(£3.50 plus 50p p&p)

.... **the Credit Crunch?** (£3.50 plus 50p p&p)

....**Community Cohesion?** (£3.50 plus 50p p&p)

....**Faith and Sexuality?** (£3.50 plus 50p p&p)

## APPENDIX 3 – DOWNLOADABLE PUBLICATIONS

The following publications can be downloaded as pdfs from the SIFRE website ([www.sifre.org.uk](http://www.sifre.org.uk))

### **Mostly Memories**

A compilation of Consultations and Tea Party Tales from SIFRE's Senior Citizens. Compiled by Cynthia Capey

### **Christian/Muslim Discussions In Suffolk 2004-2005**

Full report of the discussion held in Suffolk

### **Exploring Young Muslims' Views**

A research report about their Faith, Identity and Role in Britain and in Suffolk in particular.

Muhammad Mojlum Khan.

### **Women In Shadow.**

A report based on research into the experiences and views of Muslim Women in Suffolk.

Researcher: Elahe Moghtader Mojdehi

Editor: Anne C Spalding

### **Finding Our Way And Sharing Our Stories:**

Women of The Nineties Reflect on their Traditions. \*

A Collection from Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource compiled by Cynthia Capey.

### **Faiths Card for Emergency Situations**

A two sided A4 card which tells you all you need to know in any situation when you have to minister to anyone in need of care and attention.

### **Faith Card for Caterers**

A short guide to catering for a multi-faith occasion

### **Reflections On Growing Older**

An short anthology of writings on and about older people.

### **Strangers in our midst**

A short (dated) guide to working with refugees and asylum seekers.