

# United Faiths

Leading The Way

Welcome to the new edition of **United Faiths** newsletter. In this edition we are very proud to report on the success of our **Youth Leadership Development Programme** which took place in **Corrymeela, Northern Ireland**.

We would like to say a huge thank you to **Inderjit Bhogal** and **Patricia Farrell** without whom our visit wouldn't have been possible.

It is with great sadness we recently said a fond farewell to **Ushna Mughal**, who has been our Coordinator since 2006. Without her we really would NOT be where we are today. We owe a lot to her, and we thank her for her outstanding commitment, passion and creativity. We wish her all the best in her new role as Faith Fellow with the **Tony Blair Faith Foundation**, where she is currently working in **Blackburn**.

You can also be a part of **United Faiths** by signing up for general membership and gain new skills and advance you CV. We are very eager to hear your views on faith, racism, discrimination, crime, drug abuse, education and any other issues that affect YOU!

Please email us your comments at [coordinator@unitedfaiths.org.uk](mailto:coordinator@unitedfaiths.org.uk)

**Jasdeep Singh Degun, Chair**  
**United Faiths**



## Winning The Times Stephen Spender prize for poetry in translation

**United Faiths' Naomi Ackerman** has won first prize in the 18-and-under category for her translation from Ancient Greek of an extract from **The Iliad, Book 24**, by **Homer**.



# The Corrymeela Experience...

Starting bright (well, dark) and early on Monday 26th October we set off from Leeds/Bradford airport in a small plane. Not everyone knew each other well, but 6am was a fun time to meet people, and by the time we reached Corrymeela on the minibus I'd had several interesting conversations. Gabriel and Melkquayor were already our favourites, and when we reached the stunning cliff top location, new facilities and friendly volunteers of Corrymeela our journey became worth every minute. After a walk along the beach to Ballycastle, an ice-cream and a homemade Irish meal we began the leadership program we had come for.



The workshops run by Liz Firth were both enjoyable and constructive. Though they were sometimes hard work, we were kept going by the tea and biscuits kindly brought by Glen, our Corrymeela supervisor (The fruit shortcake biscuits were particularly popular).

After lunch on Wednesday we went on a coach trip, driven by Mike (who always had a joke), to the Giant's Causeway. Walking down to this wonder of the world the weather was beautiful, and standing on the Causeway with the sea and sunset all around us was magical. That evening we held a concert in the Cree, inviting everyone at Corrymeela, which proved to be a highlight of the week. The number of performances increased from three to twenty in an hour, and they were all amazing. Dancers, singers, poets and musicians all shared their talents, and the atmosphere was summed up in one poem of two words 'Me. We'.

Our final full day in Corrymeela began with an eye-opening trip to Belfast, and ended loudly in an Irish pub in Ballycastle. We had coffee with the Cornerstone Community and learnt of their dedication and bravery in the face of violence and hatred, photographed the murals of the UDF and visited a Catholic cemetery. We then went for Starbucks and shopping in a busy and modern Belfast, providing a contrast with the grim history of the area we had just encountered. After a fascinating talk from Revd Harold Good, one of the witnesses to the decommissioning of IRA weapons, and a productive meeting, we had a night out at the pub. The highlight of 'The Central' was definitely Inderjit Bhogal (CEO of YHFF) on karaoke!

Leaving Corrymeela on Friday morning was difficult, as we were leaving a unique and wonderful place. I felt we drove away better equipped leaders and a closer team.

**Naomi Ackerman, Council Member  
United Faiths**



# Leadership Development with Liz Firth

Liz Firth, a community organiser from Bradford, joined us in our visit to Corrymeela and worked alongside United Faiths council members on a Leadership Development programme. In this intensive and exciting programme, discussions and activities were held on power, teamwork, leadership and development.

To begin the session, Liz introduced the Planet Earth Exercise. This consisted of two teams, planet Earth and VOG. VOG was a group that wanted to demolish planet Earth in order to build a new highway. The activity involved planet Earth trying to put forward an argument to persuade VOG not to demolish their planet. After a ten minute debate, the teams were swapped so that the defenceless planet Earth now became the powerful VOG. The activity introduced the theme of power and led to a very energetic and lively debate between the two teams. The planet Earth exercise was a good insight into what came to follow with the leadership development programme as it gave us an opportunity to be on a team which had power as well as a team which was powerless. It also allowed us to explore different styles of leadership and the skills needed for it.

Following our planet Earth exercise Liz Firth gave an introduction to power and leadership. Our discussion on this encouraged the group to come up with different ideas on what they believed power and leadership was. We identified people in power and looked at how power can be used positively (Martin Luther King) as well as negatively (Adolf Hitler). We also discussed how power operates within society and with young people, which is a key issue that United Faiths are operating on.

Liz Firth then focussed on our personal leadership development where we as individuals identified key issues that affected us e.g. racism. We then discussed how we could work on these issues by becoming good leaders.

The group was then introduced to the concept of relational meetings, as a way of building power and relationships, which is a key leadership skill. To enforce this, we carried out an exercise in pairs to hold relational conversations. This was very interesting but difficult at the same time as it involved deep thought and concentration with our pair.

This was a great way in getting to know our group on a deeper level.

**Sangeeta Bali, Council Member  
United Faiths**



## Comments from Council Members

"I enjoyed the debate on planet Earth and VOG; it was a fun and positive way to start the session off as it got everyone involved."

(Christine Wairimu Mbure)

"I learnt a lot from Liz Firth, she was tough but also very professional with us. I liked how she put everyone on the spot and gave us time to speak our minds".

(Vikas Khoshal)

"Liz Firth's sessions provided a space to begin important conversations with other United Faiths members, and in an encouraging way forced us to develop as leaders."

(Naomi Ackerman)

"Liz Firth gave me a chance to grow in confidence, knowledge and took me out of my comfort zone. Liz challenged us as a group which was fun and rewarding"

(Baithani Ward-Farrell)

# Getting to know United Faiths members

**Leah Rhodes-Valery is a general member of United Faiths. Leah is a Sixth Form student at Allerton Grange School in Leeds. She applied to be a general member because she has always been fascinated by religion and wanted to learn about different faiths in the region. Leah is currently in the process of interviewing some of United Faiths council members.**



I'm here today with Sangeeta Bali, one of the newest members of United Faiths. Although she has only recently joined the team, Sangeeta is already making massive contributions.

It has been great getting to know Sangeeta over the weeks, but we felt it would be even better if we could let our readers get to know her too!

**Hi Sangeeta, where are you from?**  
Huddersfield.

**What do you do?**

I'm at university at the moment, studying primary education at Leeds Met.

**Are you enjoying it?**

Yes, it's really good. I'm really enjoying the placements and the experience as a whole.

**How was the United Faith's recent trip to Corrymeela? What was the best thing you did?**

It was an exciting and rewarding experience. Amongst the highlights was the visit to Belfast and personally experiencing the atmosphere of the 'peace wall'. This was quite ominous as 20 years elapsed since the tearing down of the Berlin Wall and the unfolding of the Iron Curtain. This proves that division never really solves anything and that the forces uniting people eventually prevail.

**What are your interests?**

I enjoy current affairs, travel, music, dance and meeting people. I really enjoy socialising. University life and United Faiths have given me the opportunity to interact with an even greater richness of faiths resulting in great friendships.

**Who is your role model and why?**

It would have to be my parents and grandparents. I have learnt everything from them as they have given me so much in life. They have shown me the importance of being involved with my own faith and others. My grandparents were amongst the founding members of the Hindu Temple in Huddersfield. My parents have also been actively involved in the Temple- my mother as vice president and my father as secretary and trustee. My great grandfather was Professor of Economics and both my parents are in teaching, which inspired the teacher in me!

**Where do you see yourself in ten years?**

I see myself teaching. I would love to take a lot from United Faiths and bring it into schools through events, celebrations and also as a part of the curriculum.

**What does your faith mean to you?**

It means everything in the sense that it encompasses my tradition, culture and values. It is not simply a rule book but a whole way of life.

**What is your favourite time of the year in the Hindu calendar?**

I love Diwali, the Festival of Light. It is like our Christmas; everyone gets dressed up, decorate their houses with lights and there are lots of fireworks! It's a wonderful time for family and friends to come together.

**What would you tell someone who doesn't know anything about Hinduism?**

It is amongst the most ancient of religions which has evolved over time. It is like a tree with many branches coming from it. Reincarnation is a central belief and the holy books include the Ramayana and the Bhagavad Gita.

**What is your favourite characteristic or value of Hinduism?**

It would be the fact that religion and culture are united. Also, it is a faith which brings everyone together, especially on festivals.

Thank you for taking the time for this interview Sangeeta!

**Leah Rhodes-Valery, General Member  
United Faiths**

## Contact Details

To get involved with United Faiths contact

**Lydia Barlow, Coordinator at:**  
United Faiths, Suite E12, Joseph's Well,  
Hanover Walk, Leeds LS3 1AB

**email:** [coordinator@unitedfaiths.org.uk](mailto:coordinator@unitedfaiths.org.uk)

**telephone:** 0113 245 6444

**Registered charity number:** 500333