



World Congress of Faiths

SPRING/SUMMER 2026 NEWSLETTER

Dear WCF members,

Welcome to the Newsletter! We hope that the following items will be of interest; and that you have a restful and fruitful Summer.

Warwick J S Hawkins
Administrator/Projects Officer

Reflection by Revd Dr Alan Race, Chair of WCF

As Chair of the WCF, every year I am invited to the celebration of the Buddha's birthday by the Taiwanese community, based in Margaret St near London's Oxford St. This takes the form of bathing the Buddha Tathagatas, baby child figures set among a garden display of fabulous flowers on an altar-type structure. They are a very welcoming and generous community, inspired by the Venerable Master Hsing Yun, and known as the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Temple and Cultural Centre. The Venerable Master, known for his "Humanistic Buddhism", founded the Fo Guang Shan monastic order, which promotes spiritual practice for daily life. In 1992 he established the lay organisation known as Buddha Light International Association, which works together with the monastic order.

The Service Order notes tells us that Prince Siddhatta, later known as Sakyamuni Buddha, was born on 8th April, 25 centuries ago, following the lunar calendar. For us that was 24th May this year. The Service Order informs us further: "Legend has it that at his birth nine heavenly dragons appeared and emitted the purest water to cleanse the newly born prince. The baby prince immediately took 7 steps, at each of which a lotus flower sprang from beneath his feet. With one hand pointing towards the sky and the other to the ground, he said, 'Between the heaven above and the earth beneath, I am the Honoured One, the One who liberates all who suffer in the Three Realms.'

Following Buddha's death, and becoming mindful of the purifying power of water, it became tradition to bathe the statue of a little Buddha to commemorate his birth. Hence, in terms of the ceremony of Bathing the Buddha, the act of bathing symbolises inner purification and acts to purify our minds.

Buddhism in China follows the Mahayana tradition and holds the Heart Sutra in high esteem. This scripture contains the famous affirmation that 'Form is emptiness and Emptiness is form,' a saying that was much repeated during the Bathing of the Buddha ceremony. Precisely what this means is a source of endless speculation. One explanation I came across runs as follows: 'Emptiness of self only means the emptiness of self, not the non-being of self, just as a balloon that is empty inside does not mean that the balloon does not exist. The same is true with the emptiness of dharma: it only means the emptiness of all phenomena and not the non-existence of phenomena. It is like a flower that is made only of non-flower elements. The flower is empty of a separate existence, but that doesn't mean that the flower is not there.'



Alan Race (centre) bathing the baby Buddhas

Prayer for World Peace was also prominent in the ceremony. Here is a portion of a longer meditation:

O great compassionate Buddha!
Please listen to our sincerest prayer.
We sincerely wish that in this world there be:
No jealousy, only admiration;
No hatred, only harmony;
No greed, only generosity;
No harm, only achievement.

O great compassionate Buddha!
Let people of different ages live in harmony;
Let people of different social stations have mutual respect;
Let people of different professions work in cooperation;
Let people of different religions practice with tolerance.

Who can dissent from these deeply held human yearnings? As we chanted them we connected them with the need continually to purify our minds as our own contribution to the peace of the world.

Annual General Meeting

Our Annual General Meeting will take place via Zoom on Tuesday 16th June at 12 noon. Please let Warwick know by emailing admin@worldfaiths.org if you would like to attend, and you will be sent the agenda and Zoom link. There will be no accompanying talk this year, as we hope that many of our members will attend the 90th anniversary Celebration Day – see item below.

90th anniversary Celebration Day

2026 is the 90th anniversary of the foundation of the World Congress of Faiths by Sir Francis Younghusband. We will be marking this important milestone by holding a special Anniversary celebration on Wednesday 15th July 2026, at the Brahma Kumari Global Retreat Centre in Nuneham Courtenay, Oxfordshire.

The day will include a multi-faith Service; the showing of an especially commissioned film by Paresh Solanki; lunch; an educational presentation on spiritual experience across traditions; group sharing about experiences of interfaith work; and dinner for those who wish to stay on. We also hope to play recordings of a speech by Swami Vivekananda at the 1893 Parliament of World Religions, and of a 1956 BBC Radio Overseas Service biography of Younghusband.

This free event is open to all members and there are still places available, so please register on the website (<https://www.worldfaiths.org/eventsandnews>) if you would like to attend.

Also, if anyone has any interesting images that we can display on the day, please scan them and send them to me. These could be photographs taken at Younghusband Lectures or other events, old posters, book covers – anything that shows the range of WCF's past activities.

Inter Faith Week

Inter Faith Week 2026 will take place from 8th to 15th November. The theme this year will be 'Lighting the Way for a Shared Future'. Please see the dedicated website at <https://interfaithweek.org> for news and project ideas.

Future of Interfaith in England consultation

In November 2025, representatives of over 40 single-faith and interfaith bodies met to discuss the prospects for interfaith engagement in England, following the demise of the Inter Faith Network for the UK. The meeting was designed to gauge the overall state of health of the 'interfaith sector', and to discuss whether any initiative need be taken to promote its flourishing – taking account of financial realism, informed priorities, and recognition of existing good practice.

A Working Party was formed to advance these considerations, chaired by former IFN Co-Chair Canon Hilary Barber and Zerbanoo Gifford, founder of the ASHA Centre. The Secretary is WCF Administrator and Projects Officer Warwick Hawkins (not in a WCF capacity). The Working Party is currently undertaking a series of regional consultation events to determine whether there is an appetite for a new umbrella body for interfaith activity in England, such as still exists for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. If you have missed the event in your region, you are invited to contribute your views via an online survey, which can be found at <https://forms.gle/huhUW6KNPLW8o42m8>.

The Working Party will review responses, prepare recommendations if mandated to do so by the consultation, and report back to stakeholders such as those who attended the November meeting. The intention is to complement existing learning and recommendations, for instance in the report 'Bursting the Bubble: Recommendations for enhancing Inter Faith Week in England', the evaluation of Inter Faith Week 2025, and the government policy paper 'Protecting What Matters: Towards a more confident, cohesive, and resilient United Kingdom'.

News from our members

Imam Monawar Hussain DL

Executive Committee member Imam Monawar Hussain, from Oxford, was one of two signatories of a recent statement by faith leaders protesting the invitation by the Oxford Union to Tommy Robinson to address a debate. The statement is reproduced below.

As faith and civic leaders in Oxfordshire and the Thames Valley we were very disturbed and saddened to learn that Tommy Robinson has been invited to speak to the Oxford Union on 28 May.

This invitation comes at a time of rising tensions between communities. It follows the Unite the Kingdom rally in London on 15 May and the terrible tragedy of the shooting at the mosque in San Diego on 19 May. The Muslim community is acknowledging a rise in Islamophobia. The Jewish communities have seen antisemitic rhetoric which has had tragic consequences in terms of attacks on people and property.

As faith and civic leaders across Oxfordshire and the Thames Valley we stand together against hatred, racism and those who would divide our communities. In order to build a strong, stable and safe society, we need all our institutions to do all they can at this time to work for peace and understanding and to resist division and racism. Everyone needs to play their part.

In this present context we believe the invitation by the Oxford Union is untimely and divisive. We understand, of course, that the Oxford Union is outside the direct control of the University of Oxford. We understand the need to protect freedom of speech and the right to protest. But these rights sit alongside the rights of every citizen and their children to go about their daily lives free of hatred and physical danger.

Those who have issued this invitation need to be mindful not only of the University of Oxford but of the city in which they live and study as students – a city which has a long tradition of hospitality to migrants and the poorest sections of society. This is a city in which there is no room for hatred. The faith and civic leaders across the city have worked closely together for many years now to combat hate and division. Those who are temporary residents in our world-leading university and who lead the Oxford Union have a duty of care to the many thousands of Muslims, Jews and others of different faiths in the city.

We make a strong appeal in these weeks and months of global tension that this invitation should be reconsidered and withdrawn for the sake of this city and its peace.

The Rt. Revd. Dr. Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford
Imam Monawar Hussain

WCF member Bodhicarini Upasika Jayasili (Jacquetta Gomes)

Last autumn the High Sheriff of Cumbria, Dr Geoffrey Jolliffe, invited Cumbrian faith leaders to the Judge's Service at Carlisle Cathedral, on 6th November 2025. WCF member Jacquetta Gomes (Bodhicarini Upasika Jayasili) represented the BGKT Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada) and Westmorland and Furness Diversity Equity and Inclusion Partnership, of which she is the Lead on Interfaith and Multifaith.



The High Sheriff, his Chaplain (Deacon Deborah Wilde) and Jacquetta Gomes (left)

Jacquetta is also a keen member of the Women's Interfaith Network (<https://www.wominet.org.uk/>), an inclusive organisation which has brought women of faith together for over 20 years across England. In 2025 WIN published a book to celebrate its 20th anniversary: 'Keeping Faith: 20 Years of the Women's Interfaith Network' (ISBN 978-1-83563-964-1). Jacquetta Gomes was the author of a chapter in the 'Keeping Faith in Each Other' section. The book was launched at the Speaker's House

in Parliament on 28th October 2025, and there was a reception in the Mayor's Parlour in Kendal Town Hall on 13th December 2025.



The Mayor of Kendal, Cllr Richard Sutton, holding the book.

Unutterable Joy anthology

“Unutterable Joy” is an anthology of WCF Journal pieces and Younghusband Lectures from most decades since WCF’s foundation in the 1936, curated by WCF Director Alan Race with Projects Officer Warwick Hawkins. It is available to buy from Amazon at £3.99 for the Kindle version, or £12 for the paperback. https://www.amazon.co.uk/Unutterable-Joy-anthology-interreligious-understanding/dp/BOBBZSYDNT/ref=sr_1_7?qid=1662110753&refinements=p_27%3AAIan+Race&s=books&sr=1-7.. The book charts WCF’s significant contributions to intelligent exploration of the meaning of religious diversity and collaboration between traditions.

And finally...

Leave a legacy or make a donation

Remembering the World Congress of Faiths in your Will, or making a donation, would help us to continue our mission to promote and share the personal and public value of spiritual life, through co-operation and dialogue between different faith communities. At a time when disagreements and conflicts between people of different religious traditions are often exaggerated by those with harmful intent, WCF offers the freedom and opportunity to meet, explore, challenge and understand different faith traditions. We do this through conferences, visits, talks, partnership working, on-line conversation and publications, including our unique international journal *Interreligious Insight*. We are one of the world’s oldest interfaith organisations, having been founded by Sir Francis Younghusband in 1936, and we have members around the world. Our Presidents and Patrons have included the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu.

How to leave a legacy

Writing a Will is relatively straightforward, but remember that when making or updating your Will it is best to seek professional advice. While it’s possible to make your own Will, if you leave out certain details it could make the Will invalid. We strongly recommended that you have it checked by a professional. Remember a Charity has produced a useful guide to making a Will at www.rememberacharity.org.uk/making-a-will .

How your gift helps

Legacies are of vital importance to WCF, no matter what the size. As a specialist charity we find it harder than many good causes to raise funds; WCF has therefore only been able to pursue its activities because of generous legacies previously left to us. Your legacy could:

- Allow us to publish more books and research papers
- Pay for a development worker
- Hire a venue for a conference
- Enable us to send the Journal to a larger number of people
- Meet expenses of speakers from around the world

Make a direct donation

You may prefer to make a donation to support our work, perhaps in memory of a loved one who was a member. You can send a cheque made payable to 'World Congress of Faiths' to our Administrator, Warwick Hawkins, at:

Flat 1, Home Farm
Sugnal, Staffordshire ST21 6NF

Alternatively, you could authorise a bank transfer to our bank account.

Name: World Congress of Faiths

Sort Code: 60-80-05 -- Account Number: 38750872

Thank you.

WCF, May 2026