



Scottish Bahá'í Newsletter issue 9



Bahá'í Council for Scotland

Dearly Loved Friends,

The Bahá'í Council for Scotland sends you its warmest love and greetings in this spring edition of the Scottish Newsletter.

Change to the Membership of the Auxiliary Board
The Council sends its deep gratitude to Nasrin O'Kane for her sterling work as an Auxiliary Board member over the past three and a half years. Our congratulations to Nasrin and Marty on the birth of their daughter Dara, and to Oisín and Roshan on the safe arrival of their new sister. The Council is delighted to be working with Carrie Varjavandi who recently returned to Scotland after pioneering in China and has been appointed to the Auxiliary Board.

Institute Seminar

A vibrant and inspiring seminar took place in Edinburgh at the end of February. Participants came from clusters all around Scotland, including a large contingent from the Islands. Through study, consultation, sharing ideas and artistic activities, they deepened their understanding of the Training Institute process. A clearer appreciation was gained of its central role in the building of the new society. In the final session, plans were made for turning the insights gained into action. The seminar is part of a process of regular tutor encounters which will be happening regularly. The next round will be locally based in clusters around Scotland. If you are interested to participate and find out more, please contact the Council.

Visitors and Visiting Teams.

'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasises the importance of travel when he tells us that: "The movement itself from

place to place, when undertaken for the sake of God, hath always exerted, and can now exert, its influence in the world. In the Books of old the station of them that have voyaged far and near in order to guide the servants of God hath been set forth and written down." A common feature of the last few months has been an increasing numbers of visits made by Bahá'ís to believers and their friends in other communities. The visitors provide resources and support to the local community, and in return they gain ideas and inspiration which they take back to their home community. The Travel teaching and Pioneering Committee recently hosted a seminar in Edinburgh which explored the skills and qualities which would help visitors to be of maximum use wherever they go. Bahá'ís from some of the goal clusters participated and were able to share their ideas about the benefits that visitors could bring to their particular cluster.

Last Year of the Current Five Year Plan.

As we celebrate the festival of Ridván 172 BE, we also move into the final year of the current Five Year Plan. The Council is working closely with the Auxiliary Board members to support the grass roots initiatives of clusters who are moving towards a position where they can sustain a programme of growth. The Universal House of Justice has described a programme of growth to us as follows: "in whatever combination and however small in number, devotional gatherings, children's classes and junior youth groups are being maintained by those progressing through the sequence of institute courses and committed to the vision of individual and collective transformation they foster." The five areas that are working towards this goal are West Highland (including Mull, Fort William, Oban and Helensburgh), North Highland (including Skye and Inverness), Orkney, the Borders, and the Western Isles (including Lewis, Harris and the Uists). The believers in these areas and their supporters are working enthusiastically to fulfil the goal of the National Assembly i.e. to have a programme of growth in every cluster in the United Kingdom. A pioneer family has just settled in Helensburgh, adding valuable resources to this cluster.

Visit of the Bahá'í Choir to Scotland

At the end of March, the Bahá'í Choir performed a beautiful devotional programme on its first visit to Scotland. It was joined by performers from Scotland and sang to an audience of Bahá'ís and their friends in Edinburgh.

Intensive Summer Training and Scottish Bahá'í Summer School 2015.



Summer school will take place at Strathallan School (same location as last year) **from August 1st to August 5th**. The school will be immediately followed by an **Arts-Based Gathering at the same location on August 6th**, and

intensive training the following week. Further details and information on how to book will be issued shortly but please put these dates in your diary.

"Naw Rúz message from Archbishop Conti"

Please see attached very beautiful Naw Ruz message to the Scottish Bahá'í Community from the Catholic Church.



Dear Friends

Once again we are in the season of fasting and looking forward to the new life of a new year and a new beginning. Naw Ruz is for you an opportunity for celebration and thanksgiving and like all new years a moment of renewal and recommitment. For Christians this sense of new beginnings and renewal will be celebrated at Easter which takes place at the beginning of April. For us this is a time when we remember the Resurrection of Jesus and recognise that God can bring new life even from death.

Our world today badly needs this belief in new life and renewal. The media constantly puts before us instances of religious violence and hatred. Many of our co-religionists are being persecuted and killed simply for who they are and what they believe. It is very difficult to know what we can do about this. I understand that 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of your founder Bahá'u'lláh has said,

"When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love"

May these inspiring words renew our thoughts of peace and love for one another as we celebrate our various feasts and may our work for interreligious understanding be a sign to others of that love and peace, knowing that this can make a significant contribution to the reign of God in our world.

On my own behalf and on behalf of the Bishops of Scotland as well as our Committee for Interreligious Dialogue may I wish you and the whole Bahá'í community in Scotland a joyful feast of Naw Ruz and every blessing in this coming year.

With all good wishes,
Yours sincerely,

Mario Conti

+ Mario Conti
Emeritus Archbishop of Glasgow
Chair of the Committee for Inter Religious Dialogue

Pictures from Institute Seminar held in Edinburgh in February



Conversations in Faith

Huqúq'ulláh

"As regards to the Huqu which hath been explicitly prescribed in the Book. This is intended for the benefit and prosperity of the individuals themselves and is conducive to their happiness and constancy. Otherwise the one true God hath been and will always be self-sufficient in all things".....Bahá'u'lláh.

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Irene Cotugno who is Edinburgh University's Bahá'í Belief Contact, and who also works in the Human Resources department of the University was invited to take part in a series of 'Conversations in Faith' sessions which were organised by the Bishops' Committee for Inter-religious Dialogue at the Lauriston Jesuit Centre in Edinburgh.

These aim of these 'Conversations' is to

"foster understanding and respect amongst people of faith that will inspire us to work together for peace."

The conversation took the form of a question and answer dialogue which ranged from Irene's early life where she explained that she was born into a Bahá'í family, her mother was the first to recognise Bahá'u'lláh before Irene was born. She went on to explain about the independent investigation of truth and how Bahá'í youth at the age of 15 make their own commitment to the Faith. She then spoke at length on Bahá'u'lláh, His life, His exiles and His writings.

Again in answer to various questions from the audience she explained the major principles of the Faith including the oneness of humanity, the equality of men and women, universal peace and a world commonwealth. Irene then went on to explain about the development of our souls through prayer and service ,not just in words but also in actions. She spoke at length about the oneness of God and His Manifestations who not only bring the spiritual messages from God but also bring social solutions for humanity at the time of Their appearance.

Irene explained that the Bahá'í Faith have no clergy and that everyone was responsible for teaching and speaking about the Faith. She gave a wonderful description of the 'Covenant' of Bahá'u'lláh, and the role of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, the Universal House of Justice. She spoke about the Local, National and International administrative bodies and how they are elected. The evening concluded with a tea and coffee, with many members of the audience coming up to thank Irene for her for wonderful, informative talk and again asking yet more questions.

Ayyam-i-há Gift!



Many of the Friends gathered at the home of Ricky and Janet's to celebrate Ayyam-I-há with the theme being gifting food donations to the Local Food Bank centre '**loaves and Fishes**'. The response from the friends was wonderful and Denis Curran who runs the centre was extremely pleased and sent this Email of appreciation.

From: Denis Curran
Date: 3 March 2015 13:40:44 GMT

Subject: Re: Food donation to food bank

PLEASE THANK EVERY-ONE FOR
DONATIONS OF FOOD
MUCH APPRECIATED.....Denis

Pat Morrissey puts another tick on his bucket list!!

and sends us this wonderful report on how it came about.....

"Well, that's one more tick on the bucket list. I had always wanted to visit Lewis, but as time had passed and life intervened and friends had come and gone, I'd never managed it until this, my sixtieth year before God. I made the decision on that august day in August (there's still time to send a present if you forgot my birthday by the way) that whenever anyone asked if I would do anything related to serving the Faith, I would say yes and see



what the outcome was. Of course I had taken the sensible precaution of not actually letting anyone know about this resolution, but when the friends in Kilmarnock asked, 24 hours later, if I would support them on the launch of Scottish Interfaith Week my new-minted resolve was tested. But I said yes and, surprisingly, it went ok.



Pat Morrissey (middle) with other bearded men at the Launch of Scottish Interfaith Week

Subsequent to that, Maureen Sier suggested that I should contribute to the series of public talks Mina Sheppard has been arranging in Stornoway. If you've been living in a submarine under the ice shelf without access to the outside world for the past few years you won't have heard of Mina's incredible efforts to promote the Faith on Lewis, but the rest of us know that she has organised, arranged and accommodated shedloads of people out there, while simultaneously running children's camps, study circles and devotionals, and holding

down a full-time job. For her sins she has just been re-elected to serve on the Council for Scotland, which she does with the same benign acquiescence and joyful commitment that she brings to her other acts of service to the community. So, I said, yes, I'll do that.

Ferries have caused me serious trauma issues in the recent past, and so I decided to fly. I thought I would be going in an aeroplane, but when I got to Glasgow Airport (by bus, btw, from my door in Stirling to the departure lounge - another story, another time) I found that I was travelling by modified skateboard. I have seen bigger wheels on an Ikea trolley and the wings (continuing the Ikea metaphor) were no wider than a flat packed Nigbökken wardrobe.



(What passes as an aeroplane on the Western Isles)

Of course the advantage of these little toy planes is that a tailwind of any measurable velocity can actually take hours off your flight time, and as we departed 30 minutes late, I was really glad that we had the benefit of 60mph winds at ground level to speed us on our way. I never did find out why we were late, but someone said that the pilot had fallen asleep on his naughty stool and the flight attendant had forgotten to warm up his Milupa.

Anyway, those 60mph ground winds translated into 40kmph once we reached our cruising altitude of 500 feet and I arrived in Stornoway almost before I left Glasgow. At least that's how it felt. Perhaps terror excised the intervening period from my consciousness, but it did seem like in no time at all we were skittering along the rutted driveway in front of Angus John's weaving shed that doubles as a runway (when he can find somewhere else to park the tractor) in Port-adhair Steòrnabhagh .

Mina was concerned that we might be trapped by the weather if we went directly to her home so we had a meal in a local cafe prior to heading off for An Lantair, the local arts centre, which was the venue for the talk. It was really gratifying to see that

despite the atrocious conditions, some eight friends from the community of interest and one of the local (if you call a 10mile bus journey local) Bahá'ís had made the effort to come along.



An Lantair, the Arts Centre in Stornaway

The subject of the talk was **"Spiritual Journeys"** and at its conclusion I was really gratified to notice that most folk were still awake and were keen to discuss various aspects of the concept. The next morning, after Mina's three hour online Council for Scotland meeting, I had the great joy of meeting some good friends from the old days. It was a treat to catch up and plan for future fishing forays, and maybe some arty collaborations in the summer.



Mina and Santa

After this I accompanied Mina and a local contact to the devotionals she organises in the chaplaincy centre in the local hospital. Then it was back into the bustling hurly burly of the town to help with the organisation of the Christmas party that she puts on for the children who attend her classes and summer camps. Some of the kids lived quite a bit out of town and lack of transport meant that Mina had to pick many of them up and get them, and the trifle and the Santa outfit and the drinks and party treats to the venue, and while she did that I was despatched to Tesco to buy sweets for presents.

When you only have one car then the slightest mishap can cause unforeseen delays. So when one of the children's parents inveigled Mina into giving her a lift home from work, I was left standing outside the supermarket with ten outsized bags of sugary treats, feeling a tad shady. The look on the checkout woman's face when she bundled my purchases into the bag had unsettled me for bit because I had seen that same querying, curious inquisitional scrutiny in a thriller a few nights previously, when the murderer had bought the rat poison. Fortunately Mina arrived before social services or the police, and the party went off without a hitch.

And then, oh bliss, the next day Mina and Ray took me to see the standing stones at Callanish before I joined Buzz Lightyear and Sheriff Woody on the flight back to Glasgow. The only thing of interest on the return journey was the flight attendant dislocating her thumb on the catering trolley - but being a lassie from Possil (she said) she just popped it back herself and carried on handing out caramel wafers



Callanish

There is so much potential in the work that Mina does - so many good souls already have been touched by her selfless endeavours - that any small assistance exerted in her support can have consequences which far outweigh the efforts expended by the individual. It was an honour and a privilege to contribute a tiny part to that work."

..... Pat Morrissey.

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International Women's Day 2015

Ruhy Parris who is the present Co Convenor of the Edinburgh Inter Faith Association (EIFA) and Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group (EWIG) and who remind us that **Bahá'ís**, we have been involved with EIFA from its foundation over 25 years ago. She sends us this wonderful report on the recent "**International Women's Day**".

"Edinburgh Inter Faith Association (EIFA) and Edinburgh Women's Interfaith Group (EWIG) hosted the Edinburgh International Women's Day event on Sunday 8 March at the City of Edinburgh Methodist Church.

The UN theme for International Women's Day 2015 was "**Empowering Women, Empowering Humanity: Picture it!**". The International Women's Day theme for 2015 has a dedicated hashtag for social media of "#Make It Happen". The origins of International Women's Day go back over a century, to the time of the suffragettes. The UN embraced the concept and began sponsoring it from 1975.

The guest speaker at the Edinburgh event was **Kate Barrett**, great great granddaughter of Leicester suffragette Alice Hawkins. She is "making it happen" this year by telling Alice's story and her links with Scotland. A former journalist, Kate moved to Edinburgh in 2013 for her work, and is passionate about social causes, and of course, voting (given her heritage).

There were many arts and crafts stalls, and exhibitions from different faith, ethnic and secular groups, allowing women, children, and men too, to mingle and network.



(Tasneem Ali, Sister Aelred & Sister Catherine Marie, Fatou Baldeh (overall winner of IWD Award 2015), Nila Joshi, Runa Mackay, Mumtaz Unis.)

There was an Awards Ceremony for International Women's Day, honouring women who have contributed to the community and development of society in Edinburgh. The shortlisted nominees were Tasneem Ali, a founder of the successful e-forum: Muslim Women's Association of Edinburgh; The Sisters of Mercy at St Catherine's Convent, who were instrumental in setting up and running "**The Homeless Project**" providing food, shelter, and practical support for disadvantaged Edinburgh folk every single day; Nila Joshi, recently appointed leader of EWIG, who also takes care of the Hindu temple in Leith, and runs community programmes; Runa Mackay (at 94, the oldest nominee), a long term advocate for peacebuilding in the Middle East, a doctor there for 40 years with the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society, who in Edinburgh raises awareness of the plight of women and children in the Middle East; and Mumtaz Unis, who has been instrumental in forming a local group set up specifically for women from ethnic minority backgrounds with eyesight problems.



(Ruhy Parris presenting award to winner Fatou)

The Award was presented to Fatou Baldeh, originally from the Gambia, who has carried out extensive work in Edinburgh and abroad in countries where female genital mutilation (FGM) is prevalent. She runs courses for professionals to give them full understanding of the complex issues. She educates all on what FGM is, why it is done, and more importantly why it **Should not be done.**

Fatou is a survivor of FGM herself, and as such has a unique insight and firsthand experience of the culture surrounding this practice.

In my capacity of co convenor of EIFA, I was privileged to meet all these unique women, and share their experiences, and present them with certificates, and the award to Fatou Baldeh. This was the 3rd year that EIFA had cohosted this event in Edinburgh, and it is now well established in the calendar.".....Ruhy Parris

Naw-Rúz In Lanarkshire

Another wonderful celebration of Naw-Rúz took place on the Friday evening of the 20th March in Hamilton. Well over 100 people gathered to welcome in the Bahá'í New Year, and for quite a number of them, it was their first experience of a Bahá'í event. Bahá'ís came Aberdeenshire, Fife, Lothian, Dumfriesshire, Argyll and Bute, Ayrshire, Glasgow and greater Glasgow and of course across the whole of Lanarkshire.

The evening began with a wonderful organised by Janet Pooran, based on the theme of unity. It marked the end the Fast and the start of the new month of Bahá.



A 'Pot Luck' supper was then



served. This included rice dishes, chicken and meat dishes, vegetarian meals, and pizzas to name but a few of the incredible meals that the Friends brought along. Then we had the most wonderful array of deserts, cakes and biscuits and all washed down with Tea, Coffee, and various juices.

Let's Dance!

Then the dancing began! The Ceilidh Band which had been waiting behind the stage curtains suddenly burst into action. The Band, which was called **Caledonia Sound**, started playing all sorts of reels and soon the floor was covered in dancers.



Some Naw-Rúz Selfies!



After the dancing, Janet Pooran gave a brief insight to Naw-Rúz and its special significance in the context of the introduction of the **Bádi Calendar**. She finished by reciting the **Naw-Rúz Tablet**. The final event was a small fireworks display in the car park. All in all everyone went home happy, fed and danced out!!

Orkney Naw-Rúz Celebration



The Orkney Community gather to Celebrate a Naw-Rúz

Aberdeen Naw-Rúz Celebration



Aberdeen Community and their friends come together to welcome in Naw-Rúz.

Ayrshire Anual Picnic

The Ayrshire Bahá'í Community are again holding their annual Bahá'í Picnic on Sunday 28th June. The venue is Kilmarnock at the home of Svend Kammings large garden from 12noon till 4pm. Please bring your own food. Tea, coffee etc will be provided. The venue address is:- Balgray Cottage, Commonhead Farm, Kilmarnock KA1 5LN, for further information please ring (01563544616)

Peace One Day

Ayrshire's Community's 'Peace one Day' Will this year be held on Friday the 11th September 2015, and will be at the same venue as last year, Kilmarnock's Grand Hall.



From China to Orkney (via Dundee)



Carrie Varjavandi from Dundee shared her experiences of three and a half years in the city of Xi'an in China where she worked as a teacher in an international school as well as working with various Bahá'í educational groups of all ages.

An artist as well as a teacher, Carrie is particularly fascinated by the surviving traditional crafts and artisanship she discovered there, and shared some of what she learned of the popular art of paper-cutting with those gathered in Inchvannie in a short hands-on workshop.

Thoughts for Reflection

"As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be. This is the balance - this is the balance - this is the balance."

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Bahá'í Readings, p. 313) - also in "An Early Pilgrimage" May Maxwell (Pub 1953 GR)

"Faith is an oasis in the heart which will never be reached by the caravan of thinking".....(Kahlil Gibran, 1883-1931)

Special thanks!

We would like to thank the friends who supplied the photographs for this issue, in particular Sean Miller, Pat Morrissey, Steve Miller, Carmelia Carew and Andy Reischl.

Remember we always need your and your communities stories on all the teaching activities, projects in your area and generally what's happening in your areas, as well as your suggestions. Deadline for next issue will be the end of July 2015 for publication in early August. Email Dereck Redfern. (redfernrcks@aol.com)