

# God's Justice in our World

Church of England Diocese of St Albans Inter Faith Week  
Event held on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2022 at St Albans Abbey



Coordinated by



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# St Albans Diocese Inter Faith Week Event

14<sup>th</sup> November 2022

Church of England St Albans Diocese, in partnership with GRASSROOTS Luton, organised Inter Faith Week Event at St Albans Abbey AL1 1BY on Monday 14th Nov 2022 at 7:30pm. Please see the flyer about the event [here](#).

Over 125 people from different Christian denominations, different faiths, and those of no religious background were welcomed from Beds, Herts & parts of the London borough of Barnet, covered by St Albans Diocese.

Talking of this first-of-its-kind event, the Diocesan Inter Faith Advisers Revd David Kesterton (Luton) and Revd Tony Rindl (Watford) said, *"It was indeed a good opportunity to share inspiration from different faith perspectives and to welcome, meet and network with friends & invited guests from different faiths, cultures, and ethnicities."*

They added, *"The evening certainly exceeded our expectations and we were again struck by the connections in the language used by the different faith representatives on the topics addressed."*

The themes covered by speakers from different faiths included Climate Change, Racial Justice, Refugees & Asylum Seekers, Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation.

The Very Reverend Jo Kelly-Moore (Dean of St Albans Abbey), the official host of the event, stated *"It was a very special evening. It was particularly good to meet and talk with lots of women who were in the room. Those I was sitting with all commented on the unity of language and purpose."*

The St Albans School students' heartwarming performances enthralled everyone. The students recited poetry and sang a moving acapella version of "You raise me up".

It was wonderful that in addition to input from different faiths, musicians from St. Albans Abbey also performed instrumental music to make guests feel welcomed at the Abbey.

In the end, a short guided tour of the St. Alban shrine was also offered to guests.

High Sheriff of Bedfordshire Lady Jane Clifford said, *"We are grateful to The Venerable Jo Kelly-Moore, Dean of St Albans Abbey, and Reverend Canon Tim Lomax Director of Mission & Ministry, Abbey Musicians and Abbey Social Justice Team for their welcome and support. It was an inspirational evening of fellowship and togetherness."*

The Diocese of St Albans is a diverse diocese. It includes a significant number of parishes where other faith communities comprise more than ten percent of the population. Broadly speaking, there are large Jewish communities in south Hertfordshire and Barnet, and large Muslim, Hindu and Sikh communities along the diocesan spine of Watford, Hitchin, St Albans, Luton and Bedford.

The Bishop of Bedford Right Revd Richard Atkinson said, *"As a diocese, we are committed to engaging with and partnering with members of other faith communities for pursuing the common good. Faith motivates and inspires our social action. How much more could we accomplish if we all worked together to address issues like racism, poverty, and climate change – this year's Inter Faith Week Event focused exactly on that."*

Rabbi Jeff Berger from Herts Inter Faith Forum and also one of the event speakers, said, *“It was such a wonderful evening. It was delightful to share everyone's company and to meet many people for the first time. There was an excitement and spiritual uplift in the room before, during and after the event. It was a privilege to participate and to meet so many new faces and reconnect with friends. May the good work of all our communities, be blessed and bring blessing to those around us.”*

- Ends -

**NOTES:**

- 1) [The Diocese of St Albans](#) is working on inter faith issues in partnership with Luton based [Grassroots Programme](#), which has been working with Churches and different faith communities in Luton for over 30 years.
- 2) Inter Faith Week is a programme of the [Inter Faith Network for the UK](#) (IFN), a charity which has been working since 1987 to promote inter faith understanding and cooperation in the UK. IFN's programme of work, including Inter Faith Week, is supported by faith communities, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, trusts and other donors.
- 3) Inter Faith Week 2022 began on Sunday 13 November in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. This is a special Week which highlights the contribution of faith groups to society; encourages greater inter faith understanding and cooperation and also dialogue between those of religious and non-religious beliefs. It is timed to begin each year on Remembrance Sunday to encourage remembering together of the service of those of different faiths and beliefs from the UK and the Commonwealth.
- 4) More information on Inter Faith Week can be found at: <http://www.interfaithweek.org/>  
The hashtag for social media is #InterFaithWeek.  
Inter Faith Week social media accounts can be found at  
<http://www.twitter.com/IFWeek>  
<http://www.facebook.com/ifweek>  
<http://www.instagram.com/IFWeek>
- 5) A range of Inter Faith Week activities in England are being supported also through the [Near Neighbours Programme](#) of the [Church Urban Fund](#), including through its Government supported [small grants scheme](#).



Diocesan Inter Faith Advisers

Revd Tony Rindl  
Revd David Kesterton

&

David Jonathan (Johny)  
GRASSROOTS Luton

November 2022

## Statements from different Faith Leaders shared at the Event

### Jewish Speaker on Climate Change

My name is Rabbi Jeff Berger, I am Jewish and a Trustee of Eco-Synagogue. In my faith we are praying that World Leaders at COP27 will have the vision and courage to make decisions this week which will bring us and future generations climate justice, hope, and life.

As Jews, we call out and work together for the wellbeing of our planet and all life forms. We understand this to be part of God's will.

At COP 27, nations of the world meeting in Egypt again have the opportunity, and capacity, to save tens of millions of lives, the future of countless species, and perhaps humanity itself.

We've been charged repeatedly by leading scientists to act to save our planet, and to do so urgently. According to the 2022 UN Sustainable Development Goals Report, we've lost ground since Covid-19. So, there is no time to waste.

We pray that strong, far-reaching, and legally binding decisions will be made this week to cut emissions, preserve biodiversity, and redress the injustices caused by climate change.

The Talmud acknowledges the long-distance impact of our behaviour; the rabbis of 2000 years ago knew that careless acts in one place cost lives in far off destinations. Today, the collective conduct of certain, including wealthier, countries here have caused disaster elsewhere in the world. We call our leaders to generously help the poorest nations mitigate the effects of this damage and rebound from climate chaos.

We appreciate this requires courageous, visionary decision-making. But the reward is in knowing that we've done our best to hand on to the world's children a viable, sustainable, and beautiful planet, filled with all the richness of life that we knew when we were their ages.



### Jain Speaker on Climate Change

My name is Ashwin Mehta and I am a trustee of Shrimad Rajchandra Mission Dharampur UK. I am from the Jain faith, and I will address the challenge of Climate Change from a Jainism perspective.

In the Jain scripture "Tattvartha Sutra", Lord Mahavir puts forth the message 'Paraspar upgraho jivanam' translated as

"All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence."

This quote reminds us that all organisms are connected. Affecting one is to affect the others, including ourselves.



Today, the ever-growing body of scientific evidence warns us that over the next few decades, humans and other life on our planet will unavoidably undergo chronic and sudden climate distress, due to the selfish actions of humankind.

According to Jain cosmology, we are currently in a ‘descending’ time cycle - descending in terms of the state of the world, where disease, natural catastrophes, and human character continues to worsen.

The situation certainly is daunting, and it is easy to feel overwhelmed. Yet there is hope and the teachings guide us. The Law of Karma (the principle of cause and effect) tells us that outcomes are not yet set, but critically, what we choose to do now, will determine our future.

“Ahimsa-paramo-dharma” is the foremost principle of Jainism – and translates as “Love is the supreme religion or duty”. The application of this one principle can be the strongest driving force to minimise our impact on the planet. A mindset of cooperation and collaboration, rather than competition and aggression, is absolutely necessary.

We need to look at ourselves and calm the greedy insatiable desire for more and more – this selfish and destructive tendency can only be negated through a deep feeling of love and mutual respect towards all living beings, meaning not just considering the wellbeing of my family, or my community, or even my country but the wellbeing of the whole world family which includes every human, every animal and every plant. In short, having forgotten, we need to return to, and most importantly, put into practice our true nature, and our true nature is simply love.

*Aum Shanti Shanti Shanti, Peace Peace Peace*

## Sikh Speaker on Racial Justice

My name is Sanjeev Kumar and I am the General Secretary of Shri Guru Ravidass Sangat in Luton. My Gurudwara is named after Guru Ravidass Ji who was a great saint, philosopher, poet, social reformer and a prominent religious visionary of social equality in north India during 14th and 15th century. In doing so Guru Ravidass Ji promoted and fought for Social Justice.

During this time, those perceived as low-caste were considered as lesser people. They were neglected and marginalized. They were prohibited from studying, carrying out everyday and even attending places of worship.

Guru Ravidass confronted this and taught social equality. He called for the removal of all social divisions of caste and gender. In his messages, poetry and his verses of peace, harmony and fraternity, he said



Neechan ooch karai maryaai gobind kahoo tay na darai  
(You elevate, the lowly, create equality and fear none).

Amongst many other reasons, this is why his teachings are included in the Sikh Scriptures.

Just very recently we celebrated the founder of the Sikh faith Guru Nanak Dev Ji's 553<sup>rd</sup> birthday. He too strove to emphasise love for all, selfless service, humility, compassion, equality and justice for all. These values have therefore become the foundations of our faith.

However, those that fought social injustice were not limited to my faith, 500 or 600 years ago. It is also worth remembering the strife and commitment of many others across the world who have fought injustices.

Last year, we all mourned the death of the veteran anti-apartheid icon, the Nobel-peace prize laureate Desmond Tutu. We must all thank him, for teaching us about what it means to be the rainbow people of God. So as we remember him and my Guru's teachings I want to leave you with a thought from our holy book. It states

Manas ki Jaat sabhe eke pehchanbo  
Recognise whole human race as one!

## Christian Speaker on Racial Justice

My Name is Rev. Jairo Nyaongo, Vicar of Luton Parish of St. Augustine, Limbury with Holy Trinity. I am also Bishop's Adviser for Minority Ethnic Concerns.

What gives passion to speak about racial justice is the progress that dialogue and engagement makes. We can bring about equality in all aspects of life if we continue to engage with one another.

Personally, speaking about racial justice has been a journey of listening, learning, raising awareness and responding to emerging concerns. All these have largely been supported by three factors;

1. My life journey in dealing with and responding to challenges of difference and diversity
2. The ongoing transformation in both Society and the Church continue to create conducive atmosphere to talk about racial equality. We can see that people from all walks of life are able to compete fairly for the same opportunities.
3. And the third factor is the ongoing formation of supporting initiatives which make it easy to speak about and promote racial equality.

And finally, we must eradicate racial injustice because it affects all of us directly or indirectly. We must work collectively to end all forms of racial discrimination, if we want to promote racial harmony, and fulfil God's plan for creating humanity in His own image.



## Bahai Speaker on Racial Justice

My name is Wendi Momen and I am a Baha'i. I am an advocate for racial justice. In the Baha'i faith we see humanity, in all its diversity, as one. Bahá'u'lláh wrote;



Know ye not why we created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since we have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness... may be made manifest.

Racism originates not in the skin but in the human mind. To attain racial justice, the remedies to racial prejudice, xenophobia and intolerance must address the mental illusions that for thousands of years have generated false concepts of superiority and inferiority among human beings. At the root of this intolerance is the erroneous idea that humankind is composed of separate and distinct races, people or castes, and that these sub-groups possess varying intellectual, moral and/or physical capacities, which justify different forms of treatment.

The reality is that we are a single people, inhabiting one planet: one human family bound together in a common destiny, celebrating, honouring and valuing our diversity.

The principle of human oneness strikes a chord in the deepest reaches of the spirit. It is not just a way of talking about ideals of solidarity. Nor is it some vague concept or slogan. It reflects an eternal, spiritual, moral and physical reality. We are one.

## Muslim Speaker on Refugees & Asylum Seekers

Islam requires believers to assist and protect vulnerable people and offers a number of mechanisms for their care and support. According to Islamic migration law (Hijrah), individuals have the right both to seek and to be granted asylum in any Muslim state. Furthermore, it is the duty of Muslims to accept and protect refugees for as long as they seek protection.

Islam embraces people of different races, nationalities and ethnicities. Islamic ideas of asylum and refugees reflect the inclusiveness of this religion. Its most important scripture, the Holy Qur'an, speaks explicitly about the issue of asylum-seekers and refugees:

And if anyone of the disbelievers seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the word of Allah, and then escort him to where he will be secure. (Surah 9:6)

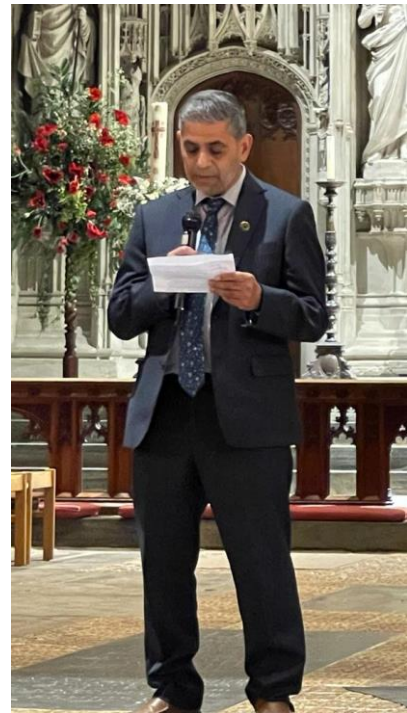
The Holy Qur'an also has numerous references to justice, particularly the importance of creating a just society, and provides a framework for justice in inter-personal relationships, toward the poor and needy, and connections between communities and nations. It speaks specifically to issues of justice surrounding asylum and refugee protection.

These concepts were integral to the creation of Islam. In 662 AD, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) fled persecution in Mecca and sought refuge in Medina.

This Hijrah, or migration, came to symbolize the movement of Muslims from lands of oppression to those of Islam. Moreover, the hospitable treatment of Muhammad by the people of Medina embodies the Islamic model of refugee protection contained in the Qur'an. Islam obliges host societies to give asylum-seekers a generous reception, for which the hosts will be rewarded. Islamic law, or Shariah, affirms the practice of providing sanctuary to persecuted persons.

This has been reflected in recent times with Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, Afghans in Pakistan and Syrians in Turkey. On the other hand our government has paid 68 million pounds to France today to stop refugees coming over and threatens them with return to Rwanda.

Where is the justice and compassion? We as faith groups have to hold them accountable.



## Christian Speaker on Refugees & Asylum Seekers



My name is Alison Steer and I am a Christian, working as part of the St Albans Social Justice Team. Here at the cathedral we try to welcome all who come to visit or worship. This goes back to Roman times when British Roman citizen, Alban, opened his door to a complete stranger Amphibalus, and welcomed him in.

This welcome has continued through the centuries. Today we are welcoming refugees and asylum seekers to the cathedral. They come from countries such as Iran, El Salvador, Eritrea, Nicaragua, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan.

They are now residing in hotels in and around St Albans. Last November some began to walk from the New York hotel to the cathedral to attend services and they still come every Sunday bringing others with them. Their English was limited and we felt it would be helpful to try to improve their English skills by having a weekly time for English conversation and a time to relax.

Luckily we have an organiser in Helen Bishop, who managed to get this up and running. She liaises with St Bartholomew Roman Catholic Church and the United Reformed Church which have also set up English conversation groups.

We give support where we can, friendship, English and hopefully a warm welcome. During the summer we organised a picnic in Ashridge Forest and a BBQ. Now some of them are contributing to cathedral life by volunteering. It is not possible to do a lot but whatever we do is appreciated.



When you hear their improved English and see them relax, smile and laugh you know it is so worthwhile. Let us hope that cathedral and St Albans will always welcome strangers.

## Hindu Speaker on Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation



My name is Pushpa Mistry. I am a Hindu and I am concerned about the Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is a phrase in Sanskrit language. It means "The World Is One Family"; all the people living on the earth are our brother and sisters.

The other two popular Hindu faith words are 'Dharma' & 'Karma'.

Dharma refers to righteousness, duty, virtue, honesty, integrity & justice. And Karma, refers to action; our deeds, what we do in our day to day life.

Lord Krishna said: Thy business is with action only, never with its fruits: so, let not fruit of action be thy motive, nor be thou in inaction attached. (II. 47)

This clearly means that not acting in favour of justice and righteousness is not even an option.

God created the whole universe in balance, but we changed the world. Now we must work to bring the justice and balance in God's creation for ALL the living beings, ensuring that no one is left behind & no one is left out and that the dignity of every human being and that of the creation, is preserved.

I conclude with another Sanskrit phrase, commonly used by Hindus across the world, as a universal prayer. It says; "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah"

It means – May all the living beings be happy, prosperous and at peace!

May we all become God's collaborators in preserving the creation, for ourselves as well as for our future generations! THANK YOU & SHANTHI – PEACE WITH YOU ALL.

## Buddhist Speaker on Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation

My name is Amaro Bhikkhu, I am a Buddhist, I am concerned about justice peace and the integrity of creation because all of these are seriously at risk in these current times.

In Buddhism our vision of justice comprises nonviolence, truthfulness, a respect for the lives and property of others, and an appreciation of the laws of cause and effect. All of these qualities are benefited by the presence of mindfulness, a caring attunement to the time, the place and the situation.

Peace is understood to come from not just laws and social standards, but also from the attitudes and composure of people's minds.



Our Buddhist Scripture is called Dhammapada and it says; Let the discerning person guard the mind. A guarded mind brings happiness. Neither mother, father, nor any other relative can do one greater good than one's own well-directed mind. (Dhp 36 & 43)

From the Buddhist perspective Nature is considered to be of one fabric, an infinite interrelated variety of living and elemental factors, all of which interact and depend upon each other. If one part is poisoned or damaged it intrinsically affects all the others; if one part is enriched or enhanced it will affect all the other parts too.

Irrespective of the way that each faith describes its concerns and values, I think that we can agree that we all share this life together just as we all share this earth, this universe. Accordingly, the more that each of our faiths can strengthen its commitment to supporting the quality of justice (fairness not only in society but also including the integrity of all creation), the more we can devote ourselves to peaceful resolution of our differences as well as finding peace within ourselves, the more that we can all genuinely respect the life and

well-being of the entire ecosphere, then our faiths can be said to be working together in a blessed and effective way for the benefit of all beings.

## Sikh Speakers on Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation

My name is Jasbir Singh and I am a member of the Guru Nanak Gurudwara congregation in Luton. Guru Nanak Dev Ji is the founder of Sikh religion who talked of universal solidarity. His concept of 'Ek Onkar' talks of oneness of humanity and the oneness of God.

As Guru Nanak Dev Ji welcomed the needy and the poor it showed that his priority was not in religious doctrines, but in the dignity of all creation and all human beings.

That is why Sikhs, wherever they are, as part of their faith, they serve 'Langar' – a communal meal at the Sikh Temple where everyone sits on the floor to eat, regardless of their social status.

Even the great emperor Akbar in India, sat on the floor and ate the same food as others, before he met with the Sikh Guru Amar Das Ji in 16th century.

This is one of the many ways in which Sikh religion disseminates the spirit of universal brotherhood and sisterhood.



My name is Paramjit Kaur and I am also a member of a Guru Nanak Gurudwara congregation in Luton. I will recite 4 verses from Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji – the Sikh Holy Scriptures.

We consider our Scripture as the living word – and we treat our Scripture as the living Guru.

I will first recite the verses in Gurumukhi language and then I will translate this in English.

Awwal Allah Noor Upaya Qudrat Keh Sub Banday  
Aik Noor Keh Sub Jag Upajiya Kaun Bhale Ko Mandhe

This is a very popular verse and it means that God created light – of which all the beings were born and from the same light, our universe is also born; so no one is better than the other and no one is worse than the other.

Logaa Bharam Na Bhoolahu Maahi  
Khaliq Khalq Khalaq Meh Khaaliq Poor Rahio Sarab Tha'ee

The creation is in the Creator; And the Creator is in the creation

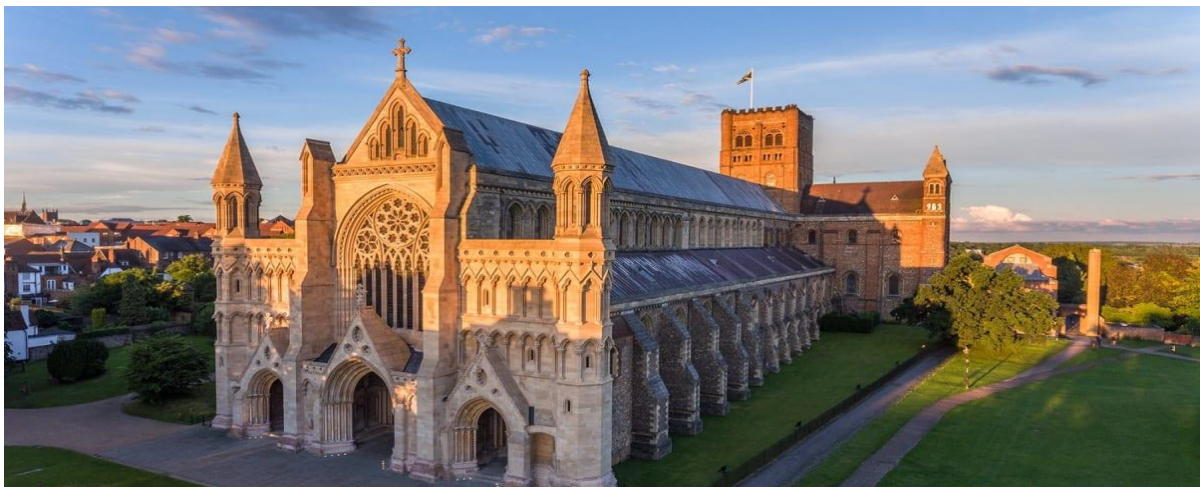
Maati Aik Anaik Bhaanth Ker Saaji Sajan Haray  
Na Kash Poch Maati Kay Bhanday Na Kash Poch Kunbharay

The clay is the same, but the designer has fashioned it in variety of ways. There's nothing wrong with the pot of clay and there is nothing wrong with the potter.

Sub Meh Sacha Aiko Soee Dis Ka Keya Sub Kuch Hoyi  
Hukm Pachanay Sae Ko Janay Banda Kahiyeah Soee

The One true Lord abides in all; and by his making, everything is made. God is everyone's heartbeat. He dwells in everyone. Whoever realises His command, knows the One Lord and he alone is worthy of serving the Lord. Everyone can look for Him. That is why all the creatures are equal sharers of His blessings.

- Ends –



St Albans Cathedral

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