

Confident Christianity

*Interfaith Engagement and understanding
for Christians and their church communities*



**Sessions for
Methodist Churches**
2nd edition

The **Methodist** Church 

St Philip's Centre
living well together 

Interfaith Engagement and understanding for Christians and their church communities

The St Philip's Centre is delighted that the Methodist Connexion has given us a grant to fund work enabling Methodists to join in with this exciting journey of faith. We expect this project to enable participants to increase their awareness of God's presence; help people to learn and grow as Christians; and become good neighbours with people of different cultures and faiths. In reference to "Our Calling" and the priorities of the Methodist Church, the project will enable participants to develop and grow their confidence in sharing their faith in a way that makes sense to those of other faiths and also enhance their own understanding of ministry and mission in a complex multi-faith, multi-cultural society. The project will encourage participants to break out of inward-looking church life to make friendships and to speak of God and of faith with people they meet in multi-faith settings, as well as providing scope for theological reflection on those meetings.



One aspect of Jesus' ministry that really challenges me is the fact that he was really comfortable as both guest and host in all kinds of complex situations. As I read the Gospels, I regularly see Jesus cross boundaries, defy social convention and build relationships with the most unlikely of people. One of the ways I learn how to get better at that is through interfaith engagement.

I have recently written on this theme in a book entitled *Hospitality, Service, Proclamation: Interfaith Engagement as Christian Discipleship*. As I look back on my decade or so of interfaith encounters, I realise that as a result of them I have become a

better guest and a better host. I have learnt to be more nuanced and Christ-like in what I welcome and what I challenge. I have had many opportunities to serve people of other faiths, but also to be served by them. I have grown in my ability to sensitively share my faith in Jesus in a way that means it is actually heard as someone speaking good news, even by those who do not share my faith. Interfaith engagement is a great way to grow as a follower of Jesus.

As John Wesley says in "On a Catholic Spirit" we must be confident and clear in our own identity, which enables us to be comfortable in engaging with others whom we disagree with. In particular we will work to grow participants' confidence in appropriate sharing of their faith with those of other faith backgrounds. Interfaith encounter does not put up barriers to evangelism; rather it equips people to act appropriately, aware of the full implications of their actions and the care needed by those who convert to Christianity from other faith backgrounds.

This booklet gives further information about the types of sessions we can offer. We are happy to run many of them online via Zoom or other video conferencing platform if that is easier for you. If you would like to know more, please get in touch with either James Blackhall – Churches Training Officer (courses@stphilipscentre.co.uk) or myself (director@stphilipscentre.co.uk)

All the best

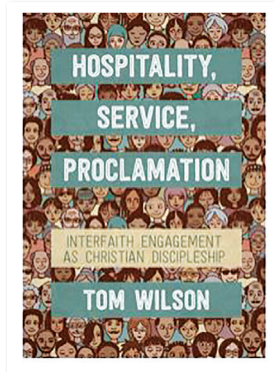
Revd Dr Tom Wilson,
Centre Director



First Encounters

1) Introducing Interfaith Themes

This session explores themes of hospitality, service and proclamation in the context of interfaith engagement. An interactive session, involving Biblical reflection, discussion of case studies and scenarios and sharing of experiences, both good and bad, of developing stronger relationships and partnerships between people of all faiths and no faith.



2) A Taste of Faith

A Taste of Faith is a discussion and Q&A based session which is an excellent introduction to a world faith. We'll bring along a faith practitioner, a box of artefacts and some snacks related to festivals and cultural traditions.



Participants can choose from a variety of faiths, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism.

Watch a short film of a Taste of Faith session on our YouTube Channel (search 'St Philip's Centre') or on our Facebook Page (search 'St Philip's Centre Ltd')

3) Texts Together

This is a really interesting way of engaging with a few different faith communities at once. Your group (be that congregation or circuit) picks a theme such as 'the environment', 'clothing and modesty' or 'birth narratives'. This session will be led in conjunction with one or more faith practitioners and can be explored in different ways, such as through music, poetry, art and/or sacred texts

You may like to pick a theme that works alongside e.g. a sermon series, or perhaps a topical news item such as the environment.

4) Festivals and Faiths

These sessions help Christians explore festivals of world faiths by learning about them alongside Christian ones – enabling discussions around shared themes and contrasts. Participants can choose from:

- Advent and Diwali
- Easter and Passover
- Harvest and Eid
- Understanding Diwali (Hindu, Sikh and Jain perspectives)

Watch a short film of a Festivals and Faiths session on our YouTube Channel (search 'St Philip's Centre') or on our Facebook Page (search 'St Philip's Centre Ltd')



Deeper Understanding

These sessions can last between 2 and 4 hours, depending on availability.

1) The Divine in Sikhism and Christianity

An opportunity for Sikhs and Christians to learn more about others' beliefs about God; during this session you can expect to cover themes such as:

- God and gender
- God's grace
- Logos and Ek Onkar
- The oneness of God



This session will be led in conjunction with a Sikh faith practitioner and can be explored through different mediums e.g. music, poetry, art and/or sacred texts

2) Preaching with Jewish Communities in Mind

The Holy Week and Easter Gospel readings are full of phrases and concepts that challenge the preacher. What should we say about Matthew 27:25, where the people cry, "His blood be on us and on our children!"? What do we make of Luke's Gospel, where Pilate seems to surrender his authority to mob rule? What about John's references to Jesus' first followers hiding for "fear of the Jews"? Working with a Jewish faith practitioner, this interactive session will enable preachers to discuss the texts they want to preach on and develop strategies for doing so that avoid casual or unthinking anti-Semitism.



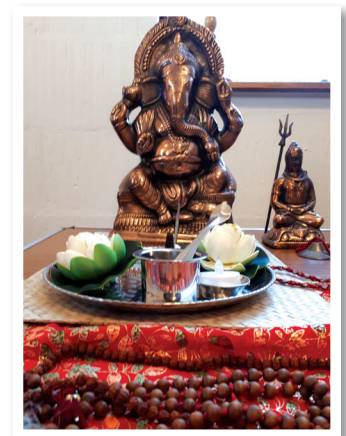
3) Prophets in Islam and Christianity

The Bible and the Qur'an both tell stories of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Mary and Jesus. There are many points of connection between the Holy Books of Islam and Christianity, but there are also points of contrast. What happens to Noah's wife? How did Joseph treat his brothers? Where did Mary spend her childhood? What exactly happened to Jesus on the cross and what is his role at the end of time? This session will explore one (or more) of these Prophet's stories, in conjunction with a Muslim faith practitioner, deepening our understanding of the Prophets' stories in our sacred texts.



4) Singing Faith: Hymns in Christianity and Hinduism

Christians love to sing. The Apostle Paul urges us to sing with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making music in our hearts to the Lord. Hindus also love to sing; within some strands of the Hindu faith there is a strong tradition of bhakti (devotional) sung worship. Working together with a Hindu faith practitioner, we will explore our favourite hymns and songs, their history, use and impact on faith and life today.



5) Baby Krishna, Infant Christ

The birth narratives of Krishna and Christ have points of contact as well as points of difference. Working with a Hindu faith practitioner, this interactive session will enable participants to learn more of the stories of Baby Krishna, and reflect on the echoes, resonances and differences with the stories of Baby Jesus.

Topics covered could include:

- Birth stories
- Dealing with difficulty
- Miracles



6) Christianity and the Far Right

It is an uncomfortable truth that some within the far-right claim Christian identity. How should Christians respond? And why is important to address this issue in our congregations and wider Church? This is a two-part session (ideally held a week apart). In the first part, participants will hear a personal story of journey from right-wing extremism to Christian faith, and in the second part will reflect theologically on how to challenge far-right claims to Christianity.



For example the extremist Celtic Cross on the left in contrast with the traditional Celtic Cross on the right.

Circuit and District Events

1) Roadshows

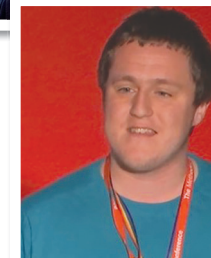
A St Philip's Centre roadshow is an exciting and energising event. We will bring a number of our volunteers from different faiths, all with resource tables, so that members of your meeting can go meet them and learn more about how they live out their faith. It's a great introduction to world religions but also an easy way to converse and ask questions about other faiths in a safe space, with experienced volunteers.



2) Speakers

Both Tom and James are happy to speak at District Synods, Away days, Circuit and staff meetings etc. about the work of the St Philip's Centre (and the 'Confident Christianity' project in particular) and our own vocations to interfaith work.

Additionally, you may like us to bring along someone, or a group, from a different faith as part of an away day or meeting – perhaps to offer a multifaith perspective on the environment, mental health, chaplaincy, leadership... many of our volunteers have specialisms in all sorts of different areas, so please do get in touch to arrange something specific.



Dialogue Groups



Dialogue Groups are an integral part of the Confident Christianity project. People from different faiths meet, not just to explore their similarities and differences together but also to develop friendships. Topics discussed

range from exploring our texts together to unique talks such as 'media in our faith communities.' You may want to come along to just the things that really interest you, or become a regular member.

It will be possible to join these discussions by Zoom as well as in a face to face group, especially if you do not live within easy travelling distance of the St Philip's Centre.

For more information on any of these groups, including the date and theme of the next session, please contact Tom or Laura (details on reverse of this booklet)

Current groups are as follows:

- Abrahamic dialogue group
- Hindu-Christian group
- Sikh-Christian group

If you would like to be part of a group that is not mentioned here, please do get in touch – you may not be the only one and we'd be delighted to set something up!

What Others Have Said About Our Work:

“As a newcomer to such a depth of interfaith engagement it was hard to know where to start. It has been a privilege to join with practitioners from a variety of faiths to share what we have in common, and to learn honestly about what we do not”

Methodist Minister

The Leicester West Methodist Circuit have valued working with the St. Philips Centre because of interaction the Centre fosters between faith communities in Leicester.

Methodist Superintendent

“I found this talk really interesting and accessible, illustrated with stunning examples of Indian Christian artwork, highlighting the fascinating inter-cultural influences in the varied but sometimes surprisingly familiar artistic presentations.”

Participant in Faith and Art Series

“Something I find fascinating about these seed verses [from The Bhagavad Gita] is that they illuminate my understanding of divine revelation in general and have aided my understanding of our own scriptures.”

Participant in Hindu-Christian Dialogue Group

“Really enjoyed... there's such a lack of understanding about other faiths. Learning about other religions and leadership was really interesting”

District Young Leader

Bespoke Sessions

The St Philip's Centre offers bespoke sessions that meet your needs in your locality, for example:

- A visit to your local Mosque... and opportunity to invite people back!
- Training session for youth workers in your Circuit or District
- Interfaith themed away-day or study day



If you would like to know more, please do get in touch – we'd be delighted to hear from you



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