

Interfaith Week

Richard Atkinson, Bishop of Bedford

Birmingham, Liverpool, Brighton, Cardigan, Bristol, Glasgow. What's the link? They are the venues for this year's Political Party Conferences: occasions that are often mired in the minutiae of party wrangling, but which offer the opportunity of the renewing and retuning of vision. A time to tackle some of the bigger issues such as those addressed by the recent IPPR report 'Prosperity and Justice: A Plan for the New Economy' to which the Archbishop of Canterbury contributed. A time for purposeful and hopeful direction post-Brexit.

Sadly the run up to this year's conference season has at times been focused on what divides us as a nation, rather than on the essential interdependence of what should be an united and flourishing people. In particular, significant concerns about anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, have dominated the agenda. As important, as internal party issues, has been a wider context of growing concern about hate crime, extremism – not least on the far right – and racism.

Dame Helen Hyde, the former Head of Watford Grammar School for Girls recently wrote of her concern about the growing anti-Semitic threat and commented that 'The same-old anti-Semitic myths and conspiracy theories are spreading openly and seem to be equally acceptable to educated people on the left and the right'. Tell Mama, which measures anti-Muslim attacks, has recorded growing numbers of incidents in recent months. The Brexit related debate about national identity often acquires a Xenophobic character.

As I enter my fifth and final year as Co-Chair of the national Inter Faith Network, which works to bring together the faith communities of our country to enhance understanding, co-operation and good relations, in order to promote the common good, I am all the more concerned that we champion a society where all are welcome; all are valued. Celebrating this, affirming this and furthering this should very much be the

agenda of the party conferences. At its heart it is the fundamental call to love our neighbour which Christ commands.

Later this year it will be the tenth national Inter Faith Week which runs from November 11th to 18th www.interfaithweek.org

Inter Faith Week 2018

11–18 November

An opportunity to:

- Strengthen good inter faith relations at all levels
- Increase awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the UK, in particular celebrating and building on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society
- Increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs

REFLECT/DEBATE/
COOPERATE/LEARN/
QUESTION/RESPECT/
APPRECIATE/MAKE
FRIENDS/CELEBRATE

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Each year since 2009 growing numbers of organisations from within and without the faith communities have come together in local events and activities to build co-operation and understanding. Is this the opportunity for you with colleagues in your congregation, and through groups in the community to which you belong, to reach out to brothers and sisters in other faith traditions? Why not take the opportunity to do something that strengthens the bonds of friendship and society? For then we begin to model that just, integrated and harmonious living together that ought to be the priority for those gatherings in Birmingham, Liverpool, Brighton, Cardigan, Bristol, and Glasgow.