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Faith Forums

...from LSH's very own 'Sttg'

There has been some debate as to whether we should be represented on the various Faith Forums that operate in Lancashire. Generally it is felt that we would simply be outvoted and that it could also be said that we were involved in any 'consensus' that might emerge ... However, we decide to find out more about Faith Forums.

A member of LSH has attended meetings of Lancashire Forum of Faiths and Preston Faith Forum as well as looking into their accounts and their activities and objectives.

Preston Faith Forum was founded in 2002, has members from the Christian, Bahá'í, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish and Sikh communities and has the following objectives:

To support the Preston Strategic Partnership in the development and delivery of a Common Strategy for Preston.

To work with and in other partnerships operating in Preston.

To influence public sector decision-makers.

To exercise Forum's consultation rights.

To share concerns between faith groups.

To increase the understanding of faiths and the positive role that they and their communities can play in society.

It is only open to members of the nine faith groups recognised by the inter faith network and so it seems we could not be represented even if we wanted to be.

The meeting we attended was focussed on the plans for the 2012 Preston Guild and it was easy to see that the Forum performs a useful function in coordinating faith organisation activities.

We obtained copies of their accounts and they are turning over about £10,000pa.

The Lancashire Forum of Faiths held an open meeting on 22nd of March with a panel discussion on 'The Role of Inter Faith in a Peaceful Coexistence'.

Their 'vision' is:

The Lancashire Forum of Faiths is the voice of the faith communities and interfaith groups in Lancashire, promoting shared values and good relations, and offering advice and guidance to all sectors of society at local, regional and national level.

They state their objectives as:

Provide advice to public bodies.

Work in partnership with the statutory sector to raise awareness of the work of faith and interfaith communities.

Act as a consultative forum on local faith/religious issues for local government.

Send Forum representatives to serve on local strategic initiatives.

Promote good community relations.

Hold educational events and exhibitions.

We encourage and engage in multi-faith dialogue.

Organise discussion meetings on religious topics.

Organise discussion meetings on social issues.

Raise awareness of inter-faith events, organisations and issues.

Visit places of worship.

Dignity in Dying in Lancashire

Nicola Swan: a member of Dignity in Dying's Board of Directors; is the speaker at our next meeting.

DiD are a national campaign - a growing movement of people demanding greater choice and control at the end of life. They lobby, inform and educate people on rights at the end of life and want everyone to have what they consider to be a good death, including the option of an assisted death for terminally ill, mentally competent adults.

Those who were present at our very first meeting [Jan 08] still talk about how moving the input from DiD was.

7.30pm - Great Eccleston Village Centre - Wed 21st April - You Will Not Want To Miss This!

There'll be a voluntary 'Exit Collection' bucket available for anyone wishing to contribute to DiD's campaign.

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Potholing ... From - Ian Abbott

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"What if you were [say] not a Potholer ... you wouldn't concern yourself with potholing? If I wasn't a potholer I wouldn't care less about it!"

This was put to me recently and (on the face of it) my questioner has a point ... but wait!

What if the Government were to invite 26 of the highest potholing officials in the land [let's call them Fishups'] to become part of the legislature which makes the laws that govern everybody – even though they'll only vote how and when the Chief-Fishup tells them to; and in ways intended to advance the aspirations of potholers ... Despite the fact that the number of people who actually go potholing is very small indeed.

I'm not talking about people who have occasionally thought they might like to go potholing.

Or those who quite enjoy the kudos claiming to be a potholer may bring.

Or those who tried potholing a couple of times before deciding it wasn't really for them.

Or those who were given a talk and a free book about potholing when they were in school.

Or those who have been injured as a result of potholing.

No! ... I'm just talking about those people who make the effort to get out of bed in the morning, put on their potholing clothes, and actively participate in something they think is wonderful ... even if a great many other people think it pointless - and a bit silly.

What if that same Government offered to build lots of schools; entirely with public money, and give them to the Fishups to run, in whatever way they see fit. And the Fishups decide that, even though these schools haven't been paid for by potholers - won't be maintained by potholers - and it won't be potholers picking up the wage bill and other running costs; they are nevertheless going to keep them just for children of potholers – [provided (of course) their parents are able to demonstrate they've been potholing regularly.]

It doesn't matter that the children attending the schools aren't themselves potholers, or indeed have any desire to become potholers.

All that matters is their parents are!

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Oliver Iddon

A huge welcome to baby Oliver from all at LSH.

[A bit reluctant to say hello] he finally arrived Friday 19th March weighing in at an impressive 10lb 5oz! [Any bigger and he'd have come out already wearing his school uniform].

Congratulations Rachel and Darren

PAW Prints

from Darren Iddon



On 24 February and 10 March, a small group featuring a mixture of long standing members of LSH and also some new faces to the meetings met up to talk about "what else they could do."

This first meeting was the result of conversations between the group at the regular monthly LSH meetings, followed by many emails between the 11 who had expressed an interest in getting together more regularly and supporting each other in activities to further the cause of secular humanism.

Secular humanism being what it is, the first get together touched on a wide variety of topics: sex education; animal rights; faith forums; House of Lords; events; council contracts; humanism courses, school acceptance policies and marketing.

The first challenge seemed to be getting some structure around the discussions and focus on the topics, while not losing the advantage that a group of motivated individuals can bring in the form of speed of action and innovation of ideas.

By the second meeting, things seemed a lot more focussed, with David[K] reporting back on his investigation into Faith Forums (see elsewhere in this newsletter for more details), and Helen [CW] giving an update on the facebook group she has created (search for Lancashire Secular Humanists on facebook) and the work she has done with David [B] to upgrade the existing LSH website, expected to go live in June this year.

Minutes for this meeting can be found on the forum, where you can find out more on the above as well as Wyre Borough Council Leisure Facilities, Education, Humanist Courses, Marketing.

We will be meeting again on Thursday 1 April, 7.30pm at the Anderton Arms in Preston (just off the M6 at J31A). New attendees are welcome, as are new topics; visit the forum for updates on our progress, or to get involved yourself.

Anthropology of Religion

We were pleased to welcome Gloria Parkinson-Norton to our March meeting. Gloria is a final-year student at Lancaster University studying Anthropology of Religion and asked if she could come along and meet some Humanists so as to gather material for her dissertation.

Please be sure to complete the questionnaires Gloria brought with her. If you are unable to be at our April meeting, send them to me and I will ensure they find their way to Gloria. We wish her luck with her studies and hope she'll come back to share her findings with us in due course.

"I believe that the exercise of free will concerning the end of life, and the timing of the end of life, is an essential human freedom. I believe that while religious dogma may dictate or limit the choice of believers it should not be imposed on others."

*Rabbi Dr Charles Middleburgh,
Dignity in Dying Patron*

"I endorse the work of Dignity in Dying because I believe passionately that any individual should have the right to choose, as far as it is possible, the time and the conditions of their death. I think it's time we learned to be as good at dying as we are at living." ... Sir Terry Pratchett,
Dignity in Dying Patron

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AT LAST! WE'VE GOT A ROUND TOO!!

For a long time now we've been planning to formalise our LSH Library- the problem has been finding the time to get around to doing it.

Well Now We Have - Thanks To Zelda!

Free with this issue comes your first LSH Library Supplement listing 114 titles available to borrow.

The Library list will be updated each quarter to include other titles LSH Friends & Members tell us they are happy to lend out.

Details of how to lend / borrow any of the titles are on the Library list.

ENJOY!

L.S.H. - Outreach Event - 2010

Don't forget - this year it is a combined event!

All Day - Wednesday 23rd June 10am - 4pm when we will be staffing the Preston City Council's 'CitizenZone' vehicle which will be sited on The Flag Market, Preston City Centre . Can you give us an hour - or 2 - or 3 - or 4? Please let us know as soon as possible if you're coming along to help out on Wednesday so we can organise it. We don't want to find we have six there for two hours and no-one there for four.

Then - Thursday Evening from 6.30 in Room 'A' Theatre; Preston Town Hall for a '**Humanism - Any Questions?**' presentation-led discussion. As many friends of LSH as possible are asked to come along to support this event - and bring a friend with you!

There will be representatives from the media as well as local authorities present and it would be good for them to see just how widespread the support for secularism and humanism is.

Your suggestions about how we can best use the Preston City 'CitizenZone' - are still invited. Go & see CitizenZone 'in action': to find a venue near you visit <http://www.preston.gov.uk/events/search/?c=38>

Child Abuse and the Holy See

KPW relentless in pursuit of JR & RC Church

From **NSS Website**

The Pope and the Vatican's record on child abuse have been challenged today [16/03/10] at the United Nations. Both were criticised with unprecedented candour at the UN Human Rights Council by Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the National Secular Society.

Keith, who made the intervention in Geneva on behalf of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), said: "Billions of dollars - and euros - have already been paid out in respect of thousands of victims in the USA and Ireland. News of further abuse has since appeared in Austria, the Netherlands and now Germany - and this is just the tip of the iceberg.

How much more evidence of children's suffering at the hands of the Church will the UN and the international community tolerate before fulfilling their responsibility to those children to hold the Vatican to account?

"... this has led to abusers being allowed to continue offending and to escape justice, while their victims despair - some even committing suicide."

"The Vatican is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), but has contravened several of its articles, and is more than 10 years behind in its reporting.

It has habitually compounded the abuse and facilitated multiple re-offending by moving offenders around and shielding them from prosecuting authorities by imposing the "pontifical secret".

Major investigations in the USA and Ireland have been deliberately and cynically obstructed by the Church at all levels without censure from above. This includes the Vatican's representative in Ireland, suggesting that he acted under instruction from the highest level in the Church.

All this has led to abusers being allowed to continue offending and to escape justice, while their victims despair - some even committing suicide.

"The Church cannot claim it is being victimised. It still places the protection of its reputation, and even more its assets, above the protection of those entrusted to its care. Over 90% of the compensation payments paid by cash-strapped Ireland came from the tax payers, including the abused themselves.

"When we raised this issue at the UN in September 2009, the Church blamed everyone else, but did promise a paltry one paragraph on clerical abuse in its report to the UN.

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NON-MUSLIM SCHOOL SERVES 'STRICT HALAL' FOOD ⁴

Daisyfield Primary School in Blackburn has become the first non-Islamic school in Britain to get strict accreditation for serving halal food - it emerged at the beginning of March.

Although many UK schools already serve halal meat, they are only certified by the Halal Food Authority. Daisyfield School, on the other hand, has been accredited by the much more stringent Halal Monitoring Committee who enforce tougher checks on the packaging, delivery and preparation of food.

Although 95% of pupils attending Daisyfield are from Muslim families it is not clear how many of those families are strictly observant Muslims - neither is it clear what provisions will be made for children from non-Muslim homes.

Tory MP [David Davies] acknowledged it was important that faiths & beliefs were recognised but added a warning saying: *"It is also important that we allow the full integration of immigrants. Concentration of certain ethnic groups in small areas does not help that."*

LSH has written a letter to the school - the local authority - and the local newspaper ... expressing our concerns.

You can read that letter on Pg 5 Col. 1 of this Newsletter

"Being incapable of helping a loved one to die when they are at the end of their life, suffering and asking for help is undignified and wrong, and I know this having witnessed it myself at close hand."

*Zoe Wannamaker,
Dignity in Dying Patron*

Child Abuse and the Holy See

Continued from Pg 4

Even that mandatory report - already 13 years overdue and promised last September - has still not been filed with the UN.

"Following an instruction from Cardinal Ratzinger when head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, all suspicions and accusations of child abuse were to be sent to the Vatican in secret.

Furthermore, when acceding to the Convention, the Vatican arbitrarily - and disingenuously - excluded "Vatican City state" from the jurisdiction of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC).

IHEU calls on the Holy See to:

1. remove its reservation to the CRC to bring the territory of Vatican City state, to which it has instructed all abuse accusations are to be sent, under the jurisdiction of the CRC,
2. open up its files and records to CRC and state investigators, and
3. instruct all its representatives to cooperate with legal investigating authorities worldwide, something that they have signally failed to do, for example, in Ireland."



Recently Received in LSH's e-mail 'In-Box'

"I pay taxes, to pay my local faith school, to brainwash my children with improbable and unsubstantiated stories. I'd rather they be taught peace and Darwin. Both Cameron and Brown are going to increase public spending on faith schools ... that will only lead to deeper divisions, increased tensions and suppression of free thinking.

I am really glad that the Humanist movement is lobbying against this."

humanistlife

Have you visited www.humanistlife.org yet?

Give it a look; perhaps you could even submit an article. Below is an extract from one of many you'll find there written by people just like you and me:

[Noel Long had been homeless and sleeping rough for 18 months and talks about his experiences with religiously motivated charitable organisations]:

Excuse me, sir, I would just like to tell you that Jesus Christ Our Lord loves you and would like to..."

I'm afraid I never found out what Jesus Christ Our Lord would like so much to do for me as, at that point, I turned on my heel and left.

The bearer of such glad tidings was a young guy who certainly didn't mean any harm, and I didn't intend to be rude. But it was eight o'clock in the morning outside Camden Town tube station and I had been fast asleep in a doorway seven seconds earlier. I was certainly in no mood for a heavy religious discussion.

At that moment in time, frankly, I was far more interested in discussing tea than theology.

Having been on the street for eight months at the time, I had noticed a lot of resentment among homeless people about the religious content of so many of the charity organisations.

Judging by some of the people I have spoken to, and many comments overheard in the queues at food drops, many regard it as, at best, patronising proselytizing and, at worst, the cynical emotional blackmail of desperate and vulnerable people ... What exactly is it that makes born-again Christians believe that they have some (literally) God-given right to try to shove their religious beliefs down everybody else's throats?

Halal School Dinners - LSH Letter

Dear Sir;

We write to express concern over the news that Daisyfield Primary School, Blackburn; is to be the first non-Islamic School in Britain to serve halal food to its pupils. As we understand it the Halal Monitoring Committee enforces strict checks on the killing, preparation, packaging and delivery of animals.

The halal method of slaughter has been strongly criticised by animal welfare organisations who claim it causes severe suffering to animals left to bleed to death without pre-stunning. The Farm Animal Welfare Council [FACW] point out that adult cattle take up to two minutes to bleed to death under halal.

Notwithstanding the Muslim Council of Britain's claim that halal provides a quick haemorrhage with no time for the animal to feel pain Judy MacArthur, Chairwoman of FAWC maintains such practices cause severe suffering saying - "*This is a major incision into the animal; to say that it doesn't suffer is quite ridiculous.*". It is for these ethical reasons that very many people choose to avoid halal meat.

What choices are offered to parents who are ethically opposed to their children being encouraged to consume meat which is inhumanely slaughtered in this way; contrary to the recommended and approved method of pre-stunning: introduced in the UK decades ago precisely because of the barbarity of cutting the throat of a conscious animal?

Cruel and inhumane practices cannot be condoned simply to placate claims that to do otherwise could cause offence to certain individuals. There is evidence that Muslim authorities and individual Muslims accept halal prepared meat from pre-stunned animals. Such practice is entirely consistent with Islamic doctrine it is simply the case that there has been no complete agreement on this question across the whole of the Muslim community.

FAWC is a prestigious, government-appointed body and their [2003] report was unequivocal that religious slaughter causes "*very significant pain and distress*". It bluntly described slaughter without pre-stunning as "*unacceptable*" and recommended that the exemption from stunning for religious slaughter should be repealed.

To defer to the views of one sector of the Muslim community in preference to a Government appointed body of experts is curious; if not perverse.

Yours faithfully

Ian Abbott (Chair) Lancashire Secular Humanists

Potholing

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What if the Fishups then decided that, strictly speaking, potholing should be a manly pastime; it's not really for women, and it's certainly not for anybody who might be gay.

And even though nobody else in the country is allowed to discriminate over who they employ based on the applicants gender or sexual orientation; when it comes to potholing no Fishup [regardless of what any Government may think] is going to promote a mere woman to a position of high authority within potholing - or employ somebody who is gay in any capacity whatsoever!

And what if the Government;

A democratically elected Government charged with creating and upholding laws that are fair and just for everybody.

What if that Government just said - "... Okay."

I bet (potholer or not) you'd start getting concerned about potholing then ... Just a little bit ... Wouldn't You?

Faith Forums

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They have received around £100,000 of funding in the last three years -although £80,000 was in the first 18 months.

Two of their more interesting projects involve the prevention of violent extremism and also a project whereby a team of 27 volunteers visits schools to promote faith. It's interesting that faith promotion in schools seems to be slightly outside the boundaries of their objectives. Nevertheless this was described at their meeting as their 'core work' and they are looking for funding to support paid personnel!

Given the title of their panel discussion ('The Role of InterFaith in a Peaceful Coexistence') the LSH member took the opportunity to ask how Faith Schools Contributed to InterFaith Cohesion. The panel consisted of a Quaker, a Sikh, a Druid and the Headmaster of the Preston Muslim Girls School ... The exact nature of their responses is best discussed elsewhere but three of the panel members were quite willing to present both sides of the argument.

One of the Forum members in the audience stated that discrimination on grounds of faith must obviously be illegal and was pretty shocked when the actual situation was explained to him.

In summary, it seems that Faith Forums do perform a useful purpose in promoting inter faith understanding.

This has to be a worthwhile objective - given the consequences of 'misunderstanding'.

Obviously we should be concerned that the Forums have disproportionate influence versus secular objectives. LSH membership may not be possible or very fruitful.

However, they are a body where inter faith issues can sometimes be raised. So perhaps we should watch their activities and where possible attend specific meetings to raise issues that may help the secular cause - and indeed interfaith fairness and tolerance.

As an example we could persist on the issue of fairness in school admissions procedures.

"My mother, Dr Anne Turner, chose to have an assisted death in 2006 at Dignitas in Zurich. Once my mother had been accepted for an assisted death, she was able to enjoy her life for the remaining time she had, greatly reassured that she would be spared further suffering." ... *Sophie Pandit, Dignity in Dying Patron*

*"As someone who helped her son to die when he could no longer face the suffering caused by Huntington's disease, I understand fully the need to have a safe, regulated right to die system that takes the pressure off family. After all, who would let their loved ones die alone?" Heather Pratten
Dignity in Dying Patron*

*. Speaking of Quotes -
Bertrand Russell rarely lets us down.
A particular favourite of mine is:
"Most people would rather die
than think: many do."*

W.B.C. and the Y.M.C.A.

Be sure to look out for an update on this continuing saga in next months Newsletter!

What Our Neighbours Friends Are Up To

Cumbria Humanists

<http://www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk/>

7.30. Wed. 21st April: ... Eden Rural Foyer; Penrith
Dr Sarah Wykes, International Human Rights Campaigner, will talk about her experiences in this field. Sarah was arrested in Angola in 2007 while working for the NGO Global Witness so I think we can promise a fascinating account!

Isle of Man Freethinkers

<http://www.lomfreethinkers.co.uk/>

1.00. Sun. 11th April: ... Spring Celebration, Douglas . . . All members invited. Please bring something for buffet.

12.00 Thurs. 15th April: ... Lunch (Alessandro's, Castle St, Douglas)

Liverpool Humanists

<http://livehum.org>

7.30 Wed 14th April - The Crown , 43 Lime St, L/pool, LI IJQ
Supporting Humanist Schools in Uganda
a talk by Chris Wright

Greater Manchester Humanists

<http://greatermanchesterhumanists.googlepages.com/>

Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester, M2 5NS
7pm Wed 14th April: AGM [Followed by general discussion on positive Humanism]

South Cheshire And North Staffs Humanists

<http://www.humanists.org.uk/>

4pm Sat 17 April: Spring Walk ... Led by Sue and Chris Wright
Meet in Madeley 4.00 p.m. and adjourn to the
Evening Spice in Madeley for a curry afterwards.

Humanist Society of West Yorkshire

www.wyhumanists.org.uk

7 (for 7.30) Thurs 29th April: Swarthmore, 3-7 Woodhouse Sq,
Leeds, LS3 1
The AGM and "Dear Sir" a selection of the
letters Peter Wilson wrote to the Bradford T. & A

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Did - 'Does Prison Work?' - Work?

It certainly did! ... And what's more it was exactly what a Humanist meeting should be.

Zephyrine Barbarachild; a volunteer with the Independent Monitoring Board for Prisons*, addressed a well attended meeting** to give us an insight into what prisons are really like on the inside - quickly dispelling the tabloid's 'they're in five star hotels' myth; or film & TV's insistence that prisons are little more than brutal regimes where inmates are constantly being 'banged up in the slammer'.

And [for most of us] these are the only sources of information we're privy to about how the system works.

Zephyrine's informative and entertaining style very quickly led to a much wider discussion about the whole subject of prisons and saw humanists doing what humanists do best of all ... listening - thinking - asking - expressing - disagreeing - discovering - learning.

When any speaker goes out to address a particular group they quickly get a feel for 'where the group is coming from' and I imagine our guest was waiting to see if we were a 'prisons-too-good-for-em' or 'Its-all-too-too- cruel' bunch ... and I think she might have been taken aback a little by the disparate views which were aired.

Typically wide ranging in our outlooks some contributors clearly came from a concern for victims; some from a concern for offenders: still others from a more philosophical enquiry about the efficacy of imprisonment at all.

But it developed into a lively debate which (as happens all too often these days) had to be brought to a close just as it was at its most participatory ... It's certainly [another] subject we'll have to consider revisiting.

* To find out more about Independent Monitoring Boards or to enquire whether you could become an Independent Monitor yourself go to www.imb.gov.uk. Alternatively phone 0207 035 2261 to request further information or an application pack.

**If we carry on growing like this we'll soon have to look for bigger premises - perhaps you can give that some thought and then share those thoughts with the rest of us. IEd

'NON-BELIEVERS GIVING AID

...is the (religion-free) way to help disaster victims.

Initially set up by The Richard Dawkins Trust in response to the Haite catastrophe this new account will remain available for future emergencies too.

100% of your donated money will be distributed to the disaster relief - (in the case of Haiti) not even the paypal fees will be deducted since Richard will personally donate a sum to cover the cost of those.

By donating via 'Non-believers Giving Aid' you will help to counter the scandalous myth that only the religious care about their fellow human beings*.

It goes without saying that your donations will only be passed on to aid organisations that do not have any religious affiliations [in the case of Haiti they are Doctors Without Borders (Médecins sans Frontières) and International Red Cross.

*Odd how quickly preachers - televangelists - mullahs - imams (and bishops) are quick to gloat over natural disaster and human suffering - presenting each phenomenon as 'payback' for various (and vague) human transgressions.

* With apologies - the hyperlinks are for those reading this 'on-line'