

SACRE NEWS



Issue 25

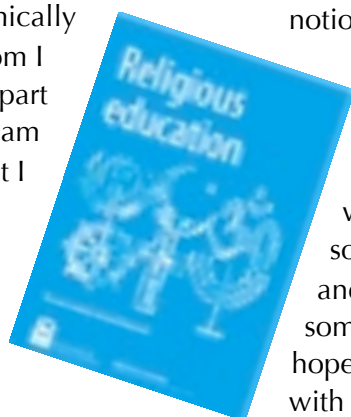
FROM THE CHAIR...



Welcome to the Summer – or maybe it should be ‘Indian Summer’ – version of NASACRE News. Such was the rush and pressure at the end of last term, with the numerous initiatives and consultations going on, that we were unable to produce the Summer 2009 Newsletter in time, for which I do apologise.

I trust that those of you who have had a summer break have returned refreshed and enriched.

I have to admit that whilst I feel honoured to be the chair of NASACRE, I do also approach it with not an insignificant sense of trepidation. For 25 years I have worked in the RE world as a teacher and an adviser. I have read books by, worked alongside and encountered numerous people, both academically and community-based, for whom I have the utmost respect, and a part of me wonders what on earth I am now doing in this role and what I can bring to it that will help SACREs in the work they do. The answer on one level, of course, is that it is a team effort, and I am privileged to work with the members of the executive who each bring their individual experience, expertise and perspective to the collective task of supporting and representing the interests of the hugely diverse community of SACREs.



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On the other hand, there is something about the role of chair that brings with it a particular responsibility and to a certain extent people look to the chair as the voice of all that is SACRE! Now when you consider the diversity in each SACRE, and when you then consider that there are approximately 152 SACREs in England, the notion of ‘a’, let alone ‘the’ voice is plainly impossible.

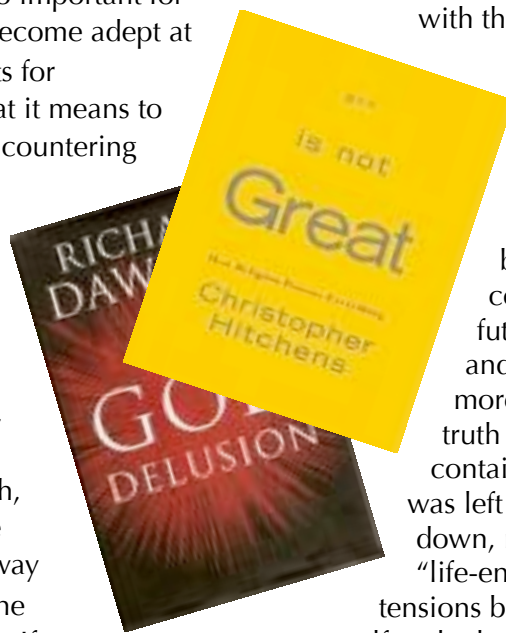
So, when I am writing this as ‘from the chair’, I know with confidence that there will be many of you who will disagree with some, or maybe all, of what I have to say – and I equally know that there will be at least some of you who will agree with bits! What I hope is that regardless of whether you agree with what I write, provided we share some sense of common purpose for RE, collective worship and community cohesion, my reflections, my enthusiasm for RE and my commitment to a

whole-child approach to education will stimulate thinking, discussion and action within and between SACREs to improve learning and living for the children and young people in our schools and communities.

These are interesting and challenging times for everyone. Medical and other forms of technology are transforming the futures (please note the plural; it is important) of homo-sapiens at a staggering rate. Whether we think this is 'good' or 'bad' is not as important a question as 'how are we going to equip our future generations to cope with all this?', because it is happening as we debate. How we live is having an impact not just in increased space (ie globally), but also in accelerating and expanding time (and possibly irreversibly). Communication revolutions spawn more communication revolutions and the speed of change, to me, is surpassed only by the speed my children manage to send texts! RU with me, lol?

And so never has it been so important for our future generations to become adept at handling complex concepts for understanding life and what it means to be a person, to be an 'I' encountering other 'I's in a world that risks becoming increasingly fragmented and objectified. These are life-enshrining concepts, in which tensions between individual and community, self and other, illusion and reality, knowledge and faith, truth and falsehood can be explored in a meaningful way that relates to the lives of the children and young people. If we give them the chance.....

I recently read Richard Dawkins' "The God Delusion" and Christopher Hitchens' "God is not great". These are books that should be taken seriously because they deal with serious issues.



However, I found both difficult to read, not because they followed complex argument or used specialist vocabulary, but actually for quite the opposite reason – they are populist books, written to have a stab at 'religion' in the modern world. Now is not the time or place to dwell too much on a criticism of these books, however, a

few reflections are relevant to what we are about.

First and foremost, in terms of the caricature of 'religion' contained in these books, there is little that many of us would disagree with. The sadness is the reluctance to address more fruitful, more affirming, nourishing and open dimensions and expressions of faith lived out in local geographical communities, many of which have few sources of hope. It is easy to knock the weakness and distortions that inhabit all forms of human endeavour; however, one should likewise do justice to the dignity, creativity and depth of faith lived for others and in spirit, even if in disagreement. These two books had more farce than force, were more dismissive than incisive and thus alienated rather than engaged

with the human spirit of people with

sincere and deep faith. We need to be aware of this, for we are a diverse community that includes people from faith communities and people with secular world-views; but we are all struggling to become more human and to create communities that flourish and have a future. We cannot do this if we belittle and alienate. It is an issue that deserves more than humour often based on half-truth and blurred pictures. The books contain some really good points, but I was left with a dissatisfied sense of being let down, rather than challenged to reflect on "life-enshrining concepts, in which

tensions between individual and community, self and other, illusion and reality, knowledge and faith, truth and falsehood can be explored in a meaningful way that relates to the lives of the children and young people."

Is this the legacy we will leave for our children?

Or should we help children and young people explore visions of humanity that contain hope



and beauty but which also take as real the ways in which individuals and communities fall short of these? Shouldn't we precede the question 'what is a good citizen?' with the questions around 'what does it mean to be me, to be a person?' We each are engaged in SACRE because we have a vision for humanity. Our children are nurtured into our particular vision, but they also need to be encountered by other visions. What is the role of schools in this? What is the place of RE and what about collective worship? How will SACREs contribute and what is our role? What can each group in your SACRE do and how do you as an individual participate in this enterprise? How do we work with other groups involved in inter-faith dialogue and community cohesion?

We have had important developments recently. A new curriculum: where is RE in this?; where are the transcendence and the spiritual (which can both have secular expression and experience)?; where is the vision of humanity that goes beyond the functional, the utilitarian, the 'citizen'? The answer to all of these is: 'where we create them.' Certainly this includes putting on pressure to ensure that RE has parity within the new curriculum; but it also involves engaging actively and creatively with changes that *all* subjects face, and doing so with vision

and with hope, pulling together all our expertise and experience. I appreciate that there was some frustration at the AGM in the light of all the change going on. We facilitated questions within a large audience and a packed agenda and for some this was not ideal. What is clear is that we are in the midst of a process of change affecting all of education and that we can influence how it moves forward.

Our role as SACREs has to be to enable RE in our schools to be so good that headteachers, pupils, parents and staff want good RE, have the framework to achieve this (the Locally Agreed Syllabus) and adequate training, support and resources. No mean task then! We are working on revising the SACRE SEF (Self Evaluation Form), the SACRE Report format and the RE Subject SEF which will be available over the next year. We hope that these will help you in this task. We need also to work together to ensure that Agreed Syllabus development is of a consistently high standard to provide stimulating learning experiences and to

link conceptual understanding to living experience for our children and young people.

I look forward to working with you all on these issues and to raising questions with you. In addition to the changes going on, there are also

some new and exciting initiatives. During the week beginning 15th November we will have the first 'Interfaith' week. Guidance on this is on our website and also on the NATRE and IFNUK websites. Please work strenuously to ensure that this will be the first of many!

Also, 2011 will be a year of Celebration for RE; more on that as it unfolds. We continue on a journey. Let us tread carefully and reflectively together.



Annual General Meeting - Keynote

Councillor Salma Yaqoob

Julie Grove introduced Councillor Salma Yaqoob as someone who might offer a new perspective on issues relevant to SACREs with particular reference to community cohesion. She has been a councillor since 2006 following experiences of racism as a result of 9/11. She has a strong commitment to issues of equality. She was included in the list, published in the Times in March 2009, of the 50 most influential Muslim women in Britain.



Faith as a force for community cohesion

Salma began by acknowledging that faith is often seen as a source of distress and a cause of prejudice. She questions the commitment to liberal values of some secularists who seem to present very intolerant views of religion reminding her listeners that there is nothing wrong with forms of secularism which allow the open expression of a wide variety of views and faiths. She pointed out that it is not appropriate to paint all religions as a force for bad. She expressed her intention to put her address in a wider political context.

She explained that her faith is a source of inspiration and that she has been saddened by examples of Muslim terrorism and the responses to it - her own negative experiences of people's responses to Muslims have forced her to become more actively involved in social action.

Believing that religion can be a source of hope and solace for people, she claimed that the issues she was addressing were more than religious questions but broad human questions. She is against all forms of oppression and is keen to stress that we need to champion the pluralism we have in Britain. She contrasted her experiences of this with the situation in France where she had been challenged as a 'headscarf' wearing Muslim being allowed a platform for public speaking. People claimed she was an example of an oppressed woman supporting the oppression of others.

When she entered to public life the first criticisms of her were from Muslims - they said Muslim women should not be taking public roles. Some Muslims supported her criticism of Britain invading Iraq others said it was a time to keep heads down and stay quiet - not antagonise or give impression they were disloyal. It was difficult for the issue of the invasion of Iraq to be discussed in mosques.

Meetings were held in churches. Misunderstandings caused an inward-lookingness. In defence of her position she quoted from the Qur'an a verse which says, 'Stand up for justice even if it goes against yourself and family'. She quoted this to her father who was encouraging her to be quiet to protect her personal safety, the safety of her children and his reputation. Her position has been motivated by her faith. She has been inspired and strengthened by people of many other faiths as well, people who have lived out their faiths in these difficult times. Diversity in the population has great potential. It is important that there is no imposition of a single faith. As soon as you start to take away the rights of one group then gradually the rights of others are eroded.

We live in times of moral crisis eg politicians expenses scandal etc etc. There is a real need for religious moral values to come to the fore on issues such as the environment, drug culture, nurture in homes/families, materialistic society etc. These values must find a place in the education system. Salma finished with a challenge for us all to consider: how can we create situation in which difference is celebrated?

AGM changes to the executive

Elections

- Denise Chaplin thanked the three people who were leaving the executive: Jane Brook, Karl D'Cruz and Robin Kanerek for all their work.
- Debbie Tibby, formerly a member of the executive was up for re-election.
- Only single nominations were received for treasurer (Michael Metcalf) and new deputy Chair, Bruce Gill, so both were duly elected.

Election outcomes

New members elected to the executive were announced:

- Helen Harrison
- Professor Harbhajan Singh
- Debbie Tibbey



The new Chair takes over: Thank you Denise

Denise Chaplin handed over to Bill Moore, the new Chair. Bill thanked Denise for all her work as Chair over the last two years and she was presented with a basket of flowers. He recognised her strengths in representing NASACRE, RE and interfaith dialogue. NASACRE has been enriched and empowered by her work.

Find out more

Find out more about the executive and the work that they do on behalf of SACREs at a national and international level by looking at the executive section of the website.



News from the AGM : Young People's Faith Forum Awards

Michael Metcalf expressed appreciation of the 18 applications for awards and to Stephen Orchard for his involvement in the initiative. The rubric for submissions has been changed for this year and is now about creating compelling learning experiences. This has enabled a wider range of projects to be included.

The following were announced as winners of awards for the coming year:

Bromley SACRE (£1300) "Faith Numbers" – a one day conference for Year 12 pupils addressing issues of community cohesion for the future, and leading to the formation of a Youth SACRE.

Redcar & Cleveland SACRE (£5000) A project on the refugee experience which involves the Borough's eleven secondary schools and uses the interactive exhibition "Escape to Safety" with a project worker and assemblies.

Solihull SACRE (£5000) A conference for 30 Year 6 pupils, leading to carefully planned visits to places of worship and the production of a quality DVD resource for use in all Solihull Primary Schools.

Southwark SACRE (£5000) A project working with Primary and Secondary pupils to explore identity, faith and reconciliation in the context of diversity and gang culture and produce a teaching resource to include statement banks and role play ideas.

Suffolk SACRE (£3000) A one day conference on ethical and global issues for gifted Year 7-9 pupils to prepare for involvement in the UNICEF Youth Voice project and launch three pyramid networks.

Torbay SACRE (£2000) The extension of last year's part-funding for TIFFY – Torbay Inter-Faith Forum 4 Youth, giving support to their project "Community Building Through Crossing Boundaries".

Waltham Forest SACRE (£5000) Production of a quality pilot teaching resource in the form of a film/video of a local pupil in partnership with a SACRE member acting as guides to a visit to their place of worship.

Windsor and Maidenhead SACRE (£2000) A well-planned RE Film Festival, with a short DVD competition for Year 6 and 9 pupils, is already under way. The Award will release funds for further development of the project.

NOTE: Reports on these will appear on the website and in the newsletter

AGM: Afternoon Keynote

After a good buffet lunch, no snooze-slot. Dialogue with national officers brought a rumble of concern about the future of Religious Education amid recent Government proposals for our youngsters' curriculum. Into this growing turbulence stepped Geoff Teece, with a most timely address. Feeling elastic about his title 'Learning from Religion and Building Community' he posed questions:



Why does good RE matter? What is RE's distinctive contribution? Why do local, national and international communities need it?

Through the address, his companion (and ours) was an inspiring collection of quotes from Madeline Bunting, Ninian Smart, Michael Grimmitt, John Hick, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, the Herefordshire Agreed Syllabus, the QCA and – not least – Jonathan, aged 12.



What do we need to understand about devotees? Not so much their religion as their religious-ness. In a synagogue we enter not so much a collection of artefacts as a house of holiness. Selfless service may be a better insight into Sikhism than a catalogue of the 5K's.

A religious interpretation of religion is the soul's depth-exploration of what it is to be fully human. The World Faiths seek to lead us from the fallen, frustrated state of human nature into a transformation where humans can find peace and happiness in a right relationship with the Divine.

What light can be a metaphor of green turtles shed on this matter? Can good RE teach us how to pursue wealth and sexual pleasure within the lotus of enlightenment?

Geoff's cultured, professional, quietly passionate championship of AT2 and RE can be found in full on our website.

Tristram Jenkins

How your SACRE can obtain the data it needs to monitor school RE provision

Phra Nicholas Thanissaro - Buddhist Representative: London Borough of Greenwich SACRE

For a SACRE to fulfil its proper function of monitoring proper provision of Religious Education and Collective Worship in its local authority's jurisdiction, it does need to work on the basis of reliable data. Although I am new to the SACRE circuit, I have heard concerns voiced in many areas of England that this data is no longer coming through to SACREs and monitoring schools over the last two years has become rather like 'working in the dark'. At the NASACRE AGM on 5 June 2009, I had the chance to question Alan Brine HMI on just this subject and considering that this issue may be of concern to SACREs other than my own, I am sharing the response for other members to whom lack of data on quality RE remains a mystery.

Most SACREs have been in existence since about 1988 and during the period 1993-2007 it was relatively easy for them to gain feedback on RE and CW performance in schools simply by reading Section 10 of the HMI school reports which were made in an extensive format during that period. In 2009, unfortunately there is no question of Ofsted reinstating the extensive format of Section 10 inspection reports merely through the lobbying of SACREs – however, Alan Brine HMI, Ofsted's Subject Specialist Adviser on Religious Education, gives SACREs the following thoughts, that as with pre-1993 data collection, SACREs may wish to take the initiative in data collection again. Initiatives might include the following activities:

- Building data collection (and analysis) into every SACRE's five-year plan as a 'monitoring action plan'. This should be synchronized with the cycle of Agreed Syllabus revision. A particular focus to the monitoring might be targeted for each year. Each SACRE could calculate the cost of monitoring and analysis and include this cost in the budget requested from its Local Authority each year.
- Ask your Local Authority to circulate questionnaires about the quality of RE and CW provision to all schools in the SACRE's jurisdiction for all age ranges. (Penny Orr-Smith has tried this approach for the London Borough of Bromley SACRE but in reality received a return rate of less than 30% - it often being non-compliant schools that fail to respond . . .)
- Discuss the possibility of using your local authority's link adviser for each school to ask questions about the provision for RE and CW
- Asking to what extent the tick boxes on the back page of the SEF are being filled out for each school (any more information than this would be deemed confidential)

If SACREs are able to implement such reforms in data collection, it will contribute to the increased credibility of SACRE status in the eyes of the schools and the Local Authority. SACREs will be much better positioned to identify and correct cases of non-compliance in RE and CW for schools in their jurisdiction.

Kirklees SACRE: Development of Interfaith Kirklees (Schools)

'My pupils learnt more in a two hour visit to the Buddhist Centre than in a whole year inside a classroom'

(Head of RE Department)

How can we support a more relevant RE curriculum for our pupils by providing real and relevant opportunities for 'learning from' religion and for the development of the spiritual, in a religion-neutral experiential context? This quest to create space for the numinous, led Kirklees SACRE to set up Interfaith Kirklees (Schools) in 2005, an organisation funded initially through the Home Office 'Positive Images' stream and more latterly by Kirklees Council.

Seven Faith Centres - spaces attached to specific places of worship – have been developed, representing the major faiths and the demographics of the region. For each, a number of 'hosts' from the relevant faith community, have been appointed and teachers, hosts and officers have combined to create bespoke 'learning packages', the hosts themselves trained to deliver these with the support of an Education Officer. This has allowed the offer to local schools of visits to the Centres – each lasting half a day, involving a class of pupils in relevant, interactive and spiritually reflective learning experiences. In excess of 6,000 pupils from Early Years children to University students have so far visited the Centres in 2008/9.

Experiences combine contemporary approaches to teaching and learning. Metacognitive and thinking skills, the concept-building, Godly Play and labyrinth approaches replace the traditional 'tour'. Emphasis is placed on the development of the philosophical and spiritual; the phrase, 'I wonder...' is to be heard frequently. A connection is made between the child's life and the religious concepts being explored, links made between the Kirklees Agreed Syllabus, 'One World, Many Faiths' and the changing nature of the curriculum.



Where to from here? Kirklees SACRE along with the newly formed Kirklees Faiths Forum in partnership with the Interfaith Kirklees (Schools) Steering Committee is to support the development of an offer of visits for parents prior to their children's visits. Rather than simply inform, we want to allow those parents to experience, to allow greater understanding of that sense of space for the numinous.

For further information, contact:

David **Raven-Hill**

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SACREs of the South

It was tempting to call it the Solent Syndicate ... Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight, and, at a stretch, Hampshire and Bournemouth. Misleading, though, as commercial gain did not feature among their motives for joining up.

This is an interesting, rich grouping: varied cultures – urban, suburban, rural and island, ensuring no-one is insular. Since 2007 these distinct SACREs have held extra network gatherings in the afternoon, rotating venues and chairs; and they intend to continue.

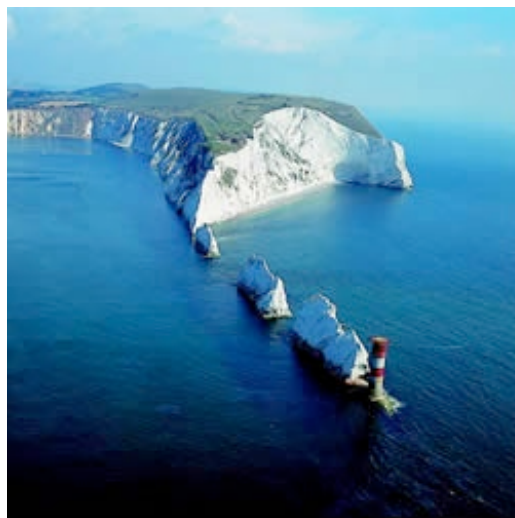
There was honest sharing of priorities, tensions, events and creative ideas. Three operate one Syllabus, and were checking on keeping in step with one another over its review (and this review vitally assisted by a joint working group).

What are the merits and pitfalls of SACRE members visiting schools and observing lessons? These were touched on. Should the visitors be briefed, even accompanied by an Adviser?

One proposed a school competition for a SACRE logo. Could others take this up too? But a second regretted it would clash with their own inter-faith competition, so the competition was abandoned. However, a third reminded us all that a logo was needed to launch the website, and invited ideas. A fascinating discussion ensued. How might a SACRE website best be branded and designed in order to serve the whole regional quintet? How could teaches in each Local Authority be induced to visit beyond their own LA for good ideas, events, resources? Should the site be titled 'The Living Difference' ... as the Syllabus for 3/5 of the group was dynamically called? This found strong support. Under the canopy of RE, could good stuff about Community Cohesion and Collective Worship be included?

Further publicity, in the form of a pamphlet: one member circulated a draft text which would explain the work of SACRE to schools and faith communities around this region, and asked for feedback.

Difficulties with the media ... suppose a good, balanced resource is produced by one partner-in-syllabus. The press grab bits of it and distort it. In this controversy local politicians are under pressure to dissociate their schools from the distorted version. They appear to reject the initiative, and partners-in-syllabus seem to fall out among themselves. So ... there's need to establish a protocol ... partners, perhaps, to agree a joint press-release where matters of common interest are concerned?



Among the participants, I felt an atmosphere of common sense and goodwill, in a forum where sharing is well-established..

I know there is ongoing thought of regional groupings for SACREs. This network seems to me the right size, and I guess a larger grouping might place strain on it.

I'm most grateful the five invited NASACRE to send an observer. Some neighbouring SACREs in other parts of England do meet and share, of course, and my two even operate jointly: more SACREs would benefit from such reinforcing co-operation.

Tristram **Jenkins** on behalf of NASACRE's Executive

inter faith
week

15 - 21 November 2009

promoting good inter faith relations

highlighting the contribution of faiths to building community

increasing understanding between faiths and wider society

Inter Faith Week will run from 15 to 21 November. Its aims are:

- to strengthen good inter faith relations at all levels;
- to 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; and
- to increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious belief.

The Week is being facilitated by the Inter Faith Network for the UK and the Department for Communities and Local Government but will be community-led, with local people and groups of different backgrounds holding their own events and to highlight work going on to promote understanding between people of different faiths and beliefs.

For more about interfaith week see their website at www.interfaithweek.org

BACKPAGE

SOME DATES FOR YOUR DIARY ...

October

3rd	Jewish	Sukkot begins
7th	Buddhist	Pavarana
10th	Jewish	Simchat Torah
11th		Interfaith Week of Prayer for World Peace
17th	Hindu	Divali
20th	Baha'i	Ann. of the Birth of the Bab
20th	Sikh	Guruship of the Guru Granth Sahib
26th	Chinese	Chung Yuan
31st	Pagan	Hallowe'en

November

1st	Christian	All Saints' Day
2nd	Christian	All Souls' Day
2nd	Rastafarian	Crowning of Halle Selassie I
2nd	Sikh	Anniversary of Guru Nanak
5th	Buddhist	Kathina Day
8th		Remembrance Sunday
12th	Baha'i	Ann of the Birth of the Baha'u'llah
15th	Japanese	Shichi Go San
24th	Sikh	Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur
28th	Muslim	Eid-ul-Adha
29th	Muslim	Eid-ul-Adha
29th	Christian	Advent Sunday
30th	Christian	St. Andrew's Day

ON THE WEBSITE ...

Do keep an eye on the website where you will find:

- 🕒 News updates
- 🕒 Information about NASACRE
- 🕒 News about events
- 🕒 News on projects
- 🕒 The Newsletter Archive
- 🕒 The FAQ archive
- 🕒 Agenda items for your next SACRE meetings
- 🕒 A membership list
- 🕒 Exemplar documentation



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Please also check your details and if necessary update the membership section and add to the exemplar documentation. Contact us at web@nasacre.org.uk

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