

"You cannot **reap** what you have not **sown**. How are we going to reap **love** in our **community** if we only sow **hate**?"

Oscar Romero



Grassroots
...a different point of view

ANNUAL REPORT 2018-2019

GRASSROOTS welcomes co-workers, guests and visitors from Churches, other faith communities, and those of no particular faith affiliation, for events, visits to places of worship in Luton, and conversations over a cup of tea or a meal.

To be kept up to date with GRASSROOTS news, upcoming events and to hear more about the work we do, there are many ways you can stay in touch, as listed below.



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Annual Report

2018-2019

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An Acknowledgement of Thanks

GRASSROOTS is blessed to have the support of many funders, partners and volunteers, and we wish to say thank you for enabling our work to continue and grow:



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Church of England Diocese of St. Albans
Luton Council of Faiths
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Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton
The Society of All Saints Sisters of the Poor
United Reformed Church Thames North Synod
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Ghar se Ghar
Luton Council of Faiths
New Creations

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Welcome to the GRASSROOTS Annual Report 2018-2019



**Message from
The Revd Canon David Lawson
(Chair, GRASSROOTS)**

Another year has passed, and GRASSROOTS has continued to offer 'a different point of view' in its presence and engagement with the community of Luton and beyond.

The pages of this report are testimony to the commitment and integrity of the GRASSROOTS team as they continue to deliver a range of imaginative and inspiring projects.

The trustees never fail to be amazed and impressed at just how much work the team does and we owe them an enormous gratitude.

In the last year we lost two of our trustees, Linda Jones and Maureen Borbone. Due to her workload at CAFOD (Catholic Agency For Overseas Development), Linda felt she could not continue as a trustee with GRASSROOTS, but we are very grateful for her contributions during her time with us.

Very sadly Maureen died during the past year after a long illness.

She was totally committed to the work and vision of GRASSROOTS, supporting the work in many ways, not least financially. The very large congregation at her funeral was a testimony to how much loved and respected a person Maureen was. We miss her presence among us.



**Message from
David Jonathan
(Director, GRASSROOTS)**

The world is a wonderful place, the place God created, admired, and said "It is good!" (Genesis 1:31) Reading the news, however, it is sometimes easy to forget this truth. We hear that the global economy appears to be heading into recession while, at the same time, the world's population is escalating. The coming decades are predicted to face two major and converging issues - a global scarcity of vital resources and the onset of extreme climate change. Experts warn of food and water shortages with increased competition, conflict and social unrest. Mass migrations of war and climate refugees may result in anti-immigrant rhetoric and the breakdown of social order.

Today's picture is no less challenging. The UK is experiencing escalating homelessness, unemployment and rising levels of poverty. There is increasing stress for those serving in the health and education sectors, while the ongoing Brexit saga continues to dominate our news. More widely, the world's rainforests are being compromised by global corporations, targeting their natural resources with little regard for their ecological importance or preservation. On the socio-political front, current world trends are supporting majoritarianism and nationalistic attitudes leading to division, oppression, and the quest for power.

In the face of such dynamics, what can we do?

Since the last Annual Report we have welcomed a new trustee, Deborah Purfield, representing the Catholic Diocese of Northampton. We look forward to strengthening our relationship with the Diocese in the near future.

To all trustees, I offer my sincere thanks for the commitment, wisdom and rich experience they bring to our meetings.

Among several pieces of good news for GRASSROOTS was the extension of the Near Neighbours Programme for another year, and the renewal of Kim Greig's contract as the Luton Coordinator. The local impact of Near Neighbours was publicly recognised when the Luton Hub received Bedfordshire Police's 'Strengthening Communities Award'.

We are also delighted at Kim's recovery from a serious road accident.

On the funding front, an agreement has been reached with the Diocese of St Albans, which will secure financial support in return for GRASSROOTS offering advice, support and practical help in the area of interfaith work across the Diocese.

Before the end of January 2020 we will be saying farewell to Karen Campbell, the Church Related Community Worker, and she will be hugely missed.

As Karen moves on to pastures new, we wish her well and thank her for all she has contributed to GRASSROOTS and to so many community initiatives in Luton and beyond. The trustees will particularly miss her profound theological reflections and poems which have often been the highlight of trustee meetings.

It goes without saying we are living through tumultuous times in our own country and around the world. Perhaps never has the GRASSROOTS strap line 'a different point of view' seemed as relevant as it does today.

GRASSROOTS offers a different model of community living and cohesion, a model based on peace and reconciliation, justice and equality; a model which seeks the flourishing of individuals and communities. The pages of this Annual Report reflect the working out of this model in Luton and beyond.

The Revd Canon David Lawson

As Christians, we are called to love. When asked which was the greatest commandment, Jesus is reported as saying "Love God and love your neighbour - everything hangs on these two". (Matthew 22:34-40)

We have a mandate to love - actively, generously, and selflessly - just as God first loved us. (John 3:16)

Jesus further said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called God's children". (Matthew 5:9)

So, we are called not just to believe in peace, but to act as peace-MAKERS - seeking peace and reconciliation between ourselves and God, between ourselves and our neighbours, between ourselves and the whole of Creation.

In his book 'Dethroning Mammon' the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, asks us to examine our attitudes and consumption patterns which contribute to ecological destruction, religious extremism and violent political regimes.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical 'Laudato Si', says that our global economy is in need of solidarity.

It needs to be more humane and must "encourage models of growth based on social equality, on the dignity of human persons, on families, on the future of young people and on respect for the environment."

At GRASSROOTS, we consciously strive to live up to these Christian ideals. Our community engagement work actively acknowledges the dignity of all human beings, irrespective of faith, culture, age, gender, or any other factors which are sometimes used to divide. Our Fairtrade initiatives are promoting social equality and awareness. Knowing that one-third of the world's food production depends on pollination by bees, we are addressing the rapid bee-decline by promoting bee-friendly gardening and local honey. We are initiating conversations on the big issue of climate change. We are doing what we can.

We hope this report inspires you to do what you can too - no matter how large or small. And, in the words of Mother Teresa, let us always remember that "God doesn't require us to succeed; He only requires that we try".

David Jonathan (Johnny)



“If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord.

So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord”

(Romans, 14:8)

The great Indian poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore said, “When you were born, you cried and the world rejoiced. Live your life in such a way that when you die the world cries and you rejoice.” Such have been the lives of the following three very special people in Luton.

Maureen Borbone

Maureen, a former Trustee of GRASSROOTS and an active member of the Luton Fairtrade Steering Group, passed away on the morning of 11th November 2018. Throughout her life Maureen remained a source of energy, enthusiasm and inspiration for us all. Her commitment to Fairtrade and justice issues was always full of vigour. Maureen’s support to promote literacy and computer education for disadvantaged children in Bangladesh has been well recognized and a scholarship has been instituted in her name. Maureen was a dedicated member of the Roman Catholic Parish of The Holy Family and St John the Apostle, in the Diocese of Northampton. In 2017, CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development) celebrated Maureen’s services as a volunteer for over 30 years, for which she received a special Papal blessing, plus a lovely thank you letter from the diocese written by Bishop Peter Doyle. GRASSROOTS colleagues were honoured to share in this much deserved celebration with Maureen. It was a joy and privilege for all at GRASSROOTS to have been able to work with her.

Natu Bhai Solanki

Natu Bhai, a long-time friend, partner and active supporter of GRASSROOTS, passed away on the evening of 11th January 2019. Natu Bhai was incredibly passionate about positive community relations, and peace between and within communities. It was with this drive that he had been an active member of Luton Council of Faiths since it began in 2001, going on to serve as a Vice-Chair from 2005 until his passing. Natu Bhai also served as a trustee at the Shree Sanatan Sewa Samaj Hindu Mandir in Luton for many years. He represented the Hindu community and Luton Council of Faiths at numerous local and national events, including the National Interfaith Network for the UK and the East of England Faith Council, for more than 17 years. In March 2018, Natu Bhai was honoured with the High Sheriff Award for his Services to the Community. As we think of Natu Bhai, we cannot help but recall his profound words of wisdom when addressing an audience in Luton Town Hall: *“What we want is not political correctness, but political fairness”*.

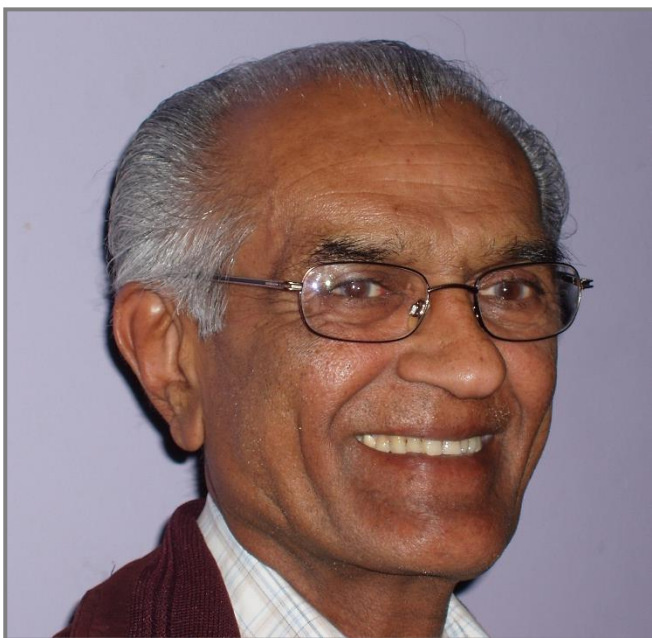
Revd Samuel Qasir

Revd Samuel Qasir passed away in the afternoon of 10th June 2019. Sam was a voluntary community and faith leader, offering spiritual and pastoral care for the south Asian Christian community in Luton for over three decades. He had been a friend of GRASSROOTS since its beginning in Luton in 1991. Sam was a proud British citizen of Pakistani Christian heritage who was particularly concerned for the persecution and oppression of Christians in Pakistan and elsewhere. His burden for Pakistan’s blasphemy law misused against Christian and other minorities in Pakistan was always in prayer before God. He was a refined, elegant and glowing human being with a delightful and charming personality. He was a man of great faith, courage and resilience, who remained faithful to his Christian convictions and calling until the end of his life. Leaving this beautiful world has never been easy, but Sam took that leap so easily, as though he was thrilled to have had the sight of his eternal home.

May the lives and deeds of these noble souls remain an inspiration for us all to contribute the best we have, for the good of all.



Maureen Borbone



Natu Bhai Solanki



Revd Samuel Qasir



The Working with Women Across Faiths and Cultures project is run by Ann Hyde, in collaboration with partner organisation Ghar se Ghar (Hindi/Urdu words meaning Home to Home), a ‘not for profit’ workers co-operative partnership. Ghar se Ghar is run by women who have lived and worked in the local community for many years and who come from different cultural and faith backgrounds. During 2018-19, events and activities were made possible thanks to kind support from the NHS Luton Clinical Commissioning Group and contributions from project participants. The Alder Trust has continued to provide invaluable support towards the funding of one of Ghar se Ghar’s workers via GRASSROOTS.

Ghar se Ghar Activity Groups

Ghar se Ghar’s provision of exercise and relaxation sessions has successfully continued with a range of different content to help meet the diverse needs of those participating and ensure that they are able to get the maximum benefit from the activities.

Activities focusing on exercise, relaxation, meditation, discussions on health topics, information provision and signposting have all contributed to helping participants maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Outings and visitors to the groups have added additional interest and provided the opportunity for participants to enjoy wider socialisation. The social aspects of the Ghar se Ghar groups are as important as physical activity, helping to combat social isolation and enhancing good mental health and social wellbeing.



Bury Park

Monday morning exercise groups ran in the Community Centre for women only.

Ashcroft

Tuesday morning exercise groups ran in The Sacred Heart Church Hall, Ashcroft, with the Healthy Ageing Programme sessions running alongside from September 2018.

Wednesday morning sessions, part of the Healthy Ageing Programme provision, ran from March 2019 in The Sacred Heart Church Hall.

Beech Hill

Friday morning exercise groups ran in Beech Hill Methodist Church, Dunstable Road, including some husbands.

1353

attendances at the group sessions

284

of the attendances addressed mental health issues

116

attendances on trips

1469

attendances in total on the programme and at events and activities

One-to-one support was given continually throughout the year and there were 211 instances of signposting/referral to other support services, regarding matters including domestic violence, health, social services, housing and counselling.

Healthy Ageing Programme

A successful bid was made to the NHS Luton Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to provide a Healthy Ageing Programme. This began in September 2018, running for an initial 6 months before being granted a 6 month extension. This is part of a multi-agency 'Frailty Framework' for Luton, which identifies different types of interventions and support for those with different levels of frailty. All Luton GP registered patients have been assessed for their level of frailty using the Electronic Frailty Index. The Healthy Ageing Programme supports people in improving their balance, stability, physical health and mental wellbeing, so that they can maintain healthy and independent lives.



A visit from the Amina Khayyam Dance Company provided musical workshops for each of the Ghar se Ghar groups



Ghar se Ghar groups enjoying Christmas Dinner at the Sun Hotel, Hitchin



Amina Khayyam, from the Amina Khayyam Dance Company, in performance. Amina is a Bangladeshi-born British dancer, choreographer and dance teacher

Precious Pearls

Over 90 women attended our annual Precious Pearls event, which took place at High Town Methodist Church on Thursday 7th March 2019, celebrating International Women's Day. Drawing on the theme 'Women & Wellbeing', the programme made use of Russian matryoshka (or 'babushka') dolls, (pictured right) to focus on the different layers which constitute the whole woman - the outer appearance, the underlying physical and mental health, the integral woman, and the innermost spiritual dimension. The evening included a range of fascinating talks and performances from Luton-based projects and initiatives reflecting on the theme.



The Ahmadiyya Women's Association shared how their faith promotes the living of a moderate life - enhancing physical and emotional wellbeing, whilst the act of prayer brings multiple physical benefits - from improving cognition and musculo-skeletal functions to lowering blood pressure and reducing anxiety. The Luton All Women's Centre outlined its provisions which include a Domestic Abuse service with one-to-one support, a counselling service, a project exploring the nature of abusive relationships, and another which focuses on looking forward and enhancing personal wellbeing.

Further contributions were offered by Meaningful Education, highlighting mental health support services, an activity-led support group and a range of courses delivered at their training centre. Total Wellbeing Luton referred to their Emotional Wellbeing Service which is improving access to psychological services, Healthy Lifestyles Programme, NHS Health checks at surgeries and in the community, Stop Smoking Therapy and the Exercise Referral Programme. A short presentation explored Complimentary Therapies including Reflexology, Indian Head Massage, Swedish Massage, Reiki and more.



Taking a different slant, Luton Irish Forum shared the history of St Patrick, while the Luton Street Pastors spoke about their work as a Christian organisation set up ten years ago by the Ascension Trust. Dar Aminah, a women's group in its fifth year, referred to various projects, including a reading group and literature discussion. As always, the presentations were interjected with a variety of entertainment pieces including piano recitals by Khushbu and Muskaan Jonathan while the Diamond Divas brought a touch of nostalgia to the evening, dancing to the Crocodile Rock, complete with hand jives!

The Beech Hill Ghar se Ghar Group gave a rousing rendition of 'Dem Bones', with further song performances offered by the Sathiya Sai Singers, and a beautiful solo by Zehra. Comedic interludes came via the Ghar se Ghar team - featuring a doctor consultation sketch, and GRASSROOTS' colleagues - addressing the different layers of woman! A trio of poetry recitals and a sitting meditation completed the programme. The much-enjoyed evening concluded with the chance to socialise around a buffet and to buy from Fairtrade and Gaza Women's Craft stalls.

Events and Activities

In addition to the health-related programme which took place during 2018-19, the year saw many other events and activities, including the 'Never Set Eyes on the Land' project run by Nutkhut (a performing arts company), exploring the partition of India and Pakistan through the prism of heritage and arts; musical workshops run by the Amina Khayyam Dance Company; two fish and chip lunches; two special Circle Dancing sessions - one in the summer, with another offered as a Christmas celebration; the annual Christmas Lunch at The Sun Hotel; a craft session and also preparation for Precious Pearls.

Circle Dancing

Regular circle dancing sessions took place at Blenheim Baptist Church Hall on Tuesday afternoons (monthly), Hockwell Ring Community Centre on Monday mornings (fortnightly) and High Town Methodist Church on Wednesday afternoons (monthly). The High Town group is a prayerful/meditative style of dancing, distinct from the others which are mostly a mixture of traditional folk/contemporary choreographies.

Special circle dancing events also took place during the year including:

- Two dance sessions for the Ghar se Ghar women's group at Ashcroft on 18th December 2018 and 9th July 2019;
- A dance session was provided for the World Day of Prayer Preparation Day on 28th January 2019 (previously called the Women's World Day of Prayer) held at Central Baptist Church where 3 dances were choreographed to music from Slovenia;
- The World Day of Prayer on 1st March 2019 included a Circle Dance at St Francis Anglican Church;
- Circle Dancing was provided for a very special event, held at Sacred Heart Church Hall on 16th June 2019 (Father's Day). This was a commemorative celebration of life for the father of Pari Rashid (part of the Ghar se Ghar team) who had been a member of a Circle Dance group in St Albans and had attended many Circle Dance events held in Luton over the years;
- Two Circle Dance workshops were provided on 25th June and 8th July 2019 at Southfields Primary School, with two more planned, to help prepare a group of children to perform a dance at the start of the Luton Annual Peace Walk 2019; and
- The Spring and August four day dance events in the Peak National Park continued, with one of the local Luton dancers now being a regular participant, and four women even travelling from Italy to attend!



The Diamond Divas perform at the Precious Pearls event



A dance performed by members of the High Town Circle Dancing group



Dance rehearsals on the World Day of Prayer Preparation Day



Performing a Circle Dance at the World Day of Prayer Service

Church Related Community Work (CRCW)



The Church Related Community Work project is led by Karen Campbell and delivered in partnership with the Bury Park Beech Hill Council of Churches. A ministry of the United Reformed Church, Church Related Community Work focuses on local people, local concerns, and local action, but is influenced by events happening regionally, nationally, and even globally. The Luton project began its work in January 2010 and will formally end in early 2020. Visitors from the central CRCW office and regional United Reformed Church in November 2018 were full of praise for all that has been achieved and is still ongoing. Activities during 2018-19 have added to the bank of achievements which will undoubtedly continue to benefit Luton beyond the term of the project.

Bury Park Beech Hill Big Bus Ride

This seaside trip has become a much-favoured annual activity for members of the Council of Churches, their families and friends. Journeying by coach, participants enjoy a wonderful day by the sea with their respective family and social groups, before gathering in a local 'host' church for afternoon tea, complete with singing, games and 'getting to know you' activities. The year running 2018-19 saw two Big Bus Rides!



On 1st September 2018, a coach-full of participants enjoyed a beautifully sunny day in Brighton followed by refreshments at Central Hove URC, complete with a rather competitive team quiz! On 17th August 2019 almost 60 participants travelled for a day out in Clacton, with a time of fellowship at Christ Church URC, including a very tense Jenga-Challenge (pictured top of page). Always well-supported, the Big Bus Rides seek to foster deeper links and a sense of belonging within the Council of Churches by taking time to laugh, play and simply be together.

The Good Friday Walk of Witness

The Good Friday Walk of Witness (pictured below) took place on 19th April 2019. Organized by the Bury Park Beech Hill Churches, the large gathering of Christians processed through several Luton streets, stopping periodically to hear the biblical account of Jesus' journey to the Cross with related reflections and prayers. All were encouraged to reflect on the unfolding scene - what do they see and feel, and how does the text resonate with our world today?



The group of walkers was delightfully diverse, with Christians of different ages, colours and cultures following the cross through Bury Park, offering a united witness to their shared faith, and frequently being greeted by members of the local Muslim community. There was an air of deep respect and solidarity as the Walk unfolded. Surely this was a glimpse now of the kingdom of God! The Walk ended with reflections at Bury Park United Reformed Church including a poem written by Karen Campbell querying 'Was It Worth It?' (see Page 31).



A Windrush Celebration

Following a very successful event in 2018, there were high expectations for the Windrush Celebration held at All Saints Church on 22nd June 2019 - National Windrush Day. A poignant opening act saw two 'grips' - olden day suitcases - being carried forward and placed on the altar (pictured above), symbolic of the original Windrush travellers, their need and readiness to travel light as they made the journey from the Caribbean to the UK. As the event unfolded the 200-strong gathering was treated to steel-band music, singing - including a choir from a local primary school, the screening of a Windrush film produced by the Council of Churches, plus individual stories and reflections. There were times to be serious, times to laugh, times to give thanks. Following the programme, Caribbean refreshments were on offer in the church hall, where guests could browse a wonderfully colourful display of images, outfits and memorabilia associated with the Windrush Generation.



It is worth noting that two members of High Cross United Reformed Church, Tottenham, were amongst guests at the Celebration held in 2018. So inspired by what they saw and heard, they planned and delivered a Windrush-themed Holiday Club for youngsters aged 4-15 years, using many of the ideas and display materials from the Luton event, and went on to host their own celebration, inviting Luton participation. It is gratifying to see just how far-reaching the impact of the work undertaken in Luton can be.



Thoughts from Your CRCW

Thoughts from Your CRCW is the monthly article written for the newsletters of Beech Hill Methodist Church and Oakdale Methodist Church, and the bi-monthly Bury Park United Reformed Church publication. The article is an important means of sharing information regarding forthcoming community initiatives being offered by the CRCW Project, GRASSROOTS, and other community and faith groups. It includes reflections on recent activities, plus consideration of where it seems God has been at work in our community and world, and what God might be trying to say to us at any given time.

During the past year it has been a welcome surprise to discover that others, beyond the named churches, also read and appreciate 'Thoughts from Your CRCW', as the church newsletters are circulated to sister congregations outside the immediate area.

Film and Focus Women's Project

Funded by Near Neighbours, the 'Film & Focus' project took place during March and April 2019, gathering women of diverse backgrounds to watch mainstream films offering parallels and connections with the experiences of different cultural groups. Hollywood blockbuster 'Black Panther' gave rise to reflections led by women of African/Caribbean heritage. 'Viceroy's House' focuses on the partition of India to create Pakistan, and facilitated reflections led by Asian participants. Building on links with the Luton Irish Forum, a third session saw the screening of 'Brooklyn', with contributions from women of Irish descent. Conversations between the participants were deep, searching, honest and open, with a genuine desire to learn from and about each other, and to work together for peaceful coexistence. Project sessions included a shared lunch reflecting the heritage of the women leading the day's discussions, and gathered approximately 20 participants on each occasion, including individuals of African, Caribbean, Asian, White British and Eastern European heritage.

Leading Worship

For the Luton CRCW, leading worship is an important aspect of her ministry. These are opportunities to make links between biblical texts and the real world, to pose questions, to push people in their thinking and to encourage them in the daily living out of their faith. Leading worship is an opportunity to listen as well as to speak, to be challenged as well as to challenge, and is both a responsibility and a privilege. In 2018-19 the Church Related Community Worker continued to lead worship regularly for Bury Park United Reformed Church, Oakdale Methodist Church and Beech Hill Methodist Church in Luton, and also accepted invitations from United Reformed Churches in Harpenden, St Albans and Walthamstow, who always appreciate the reflections and insights emerging from the Luton context. With many people still excited by the GRASSROOTS' 25th Anniversary Celebration, reflections written at that time have served as the basis for collaborations with GRASSROOTS colleagues at Oakdale Methodist Church and Wigmore Community Church, both in Luton, and Edward Street URC, Dunstable.

Shooting Stars Archery Club

Shooting Stars meets for weekly sessions in the All Saints Church Hall. The club has a small but dedicated group of participants who enjoy each other's company as well as the art of archery itself. Since its inception, Shooting Stars has included archery coaches of mixed genders, faiths and cultures, the scores of people who have enjoyed beginners' courses and club sessions also reflecting this wide diversity. Current members range from children aged 8 years to adults aged 60 plus.

Shooting Stars continues to offer periodic beginners' courses, building community links and drawing in new participants. A new course takes place in early September 2019. As a qualified archery coach, our Church Related Community Worker, Karen Campbell, has taken a lead in overseeing Shooting Stars, along with GRASSROOTS' colleague and fellow coach, Kim Greig. Recently, there has been a big focus on encouraging and facilitating club members to share the responsibilities and to take greater ownership of the club's future.

Same Difference

'Same Difference', a monthly fellowship gathering, continues to flourish. Originally a Near Neighbours funded project, Same Difference gathers people of different faiths and backgrounds to share good food, warm conversations, and to discover common ground. Whilst early sessions were each focused on a specific theme, Same Difference has evolved to see participants taking turns to lead the group, sharing and inviting discussion of their chosen topics. Sessions are incredibly varied - from deep reflections to light-hearted conversations, exploration of faith, family, traditions, and life in general. There is always laughter, and a genuine concern for each other. The food is equally as varied and interesting as the conversations, with participants generous in preparing dishes from their own cultures, buying in what is needed, and sharing produce from their gardens.



In the past year, new faces have joined the gathering, channelled through involvement in other areas of the CRCW project's work, and bringing a freshness to the group dynamics. That said, the gathering has never been static. Folks have come and gone; some individuals attend sporadically, dropping in when they are able; the group has acted as a base for other initiatives (Real People Honest Talk - see Page 21), and as a host for visitors (e.g. a prospective URC ministerial candidate wishing to see a CRCW Project 'on the ground'). The Same Difference group is a joy, and in August 2019, nineteen individuals - ranging from 80+ years to 10 months old - made their way to a local restaurant to celebrate another wonderful year.

Creative Writing Opportunities

2018/19 gave rise to various creative writing opportunities for our CRCW - something she finds increasingly important in her ministry. Karen has felt both challenged and privileged to be a current co-editor of the United Reformed Church's Prayer Handbook, jointly responsible for choosing the theme for the 2020 publication - 'Prayers from the Heart', and inviting and editing prayer submissions. Other highlights have included:

- Writing and sharing a poem for Luton's annual Holocaust Memorial Day event on 24th January 2019 on the theme 'Torn from Home'. The theme and poem had clear resonances with the Council for World Mission (CWM) Legacies of Slavery programme in which Karen participated in 2017-18;
- Writing poems for the United Reformed Church Global and Intercultural Ministries Facebook page, addressing contemporary social and political issues. One poem, written in March 2019 titled 'How Many More?', reflected on knife crime - seemingly an ongoing and escalating issue in the UK, disproportionately affecting Black, inner city and disadvantaged communities. The poem was noticed and graciously shared on the URC's main webpage;
- The poem 'Was It Worth It?' (see Page 31), was written by invitation as an Easter submission for the URC webpage, and also shared during the Good Friday Walk of Witness in Luton on 19th April 2019.

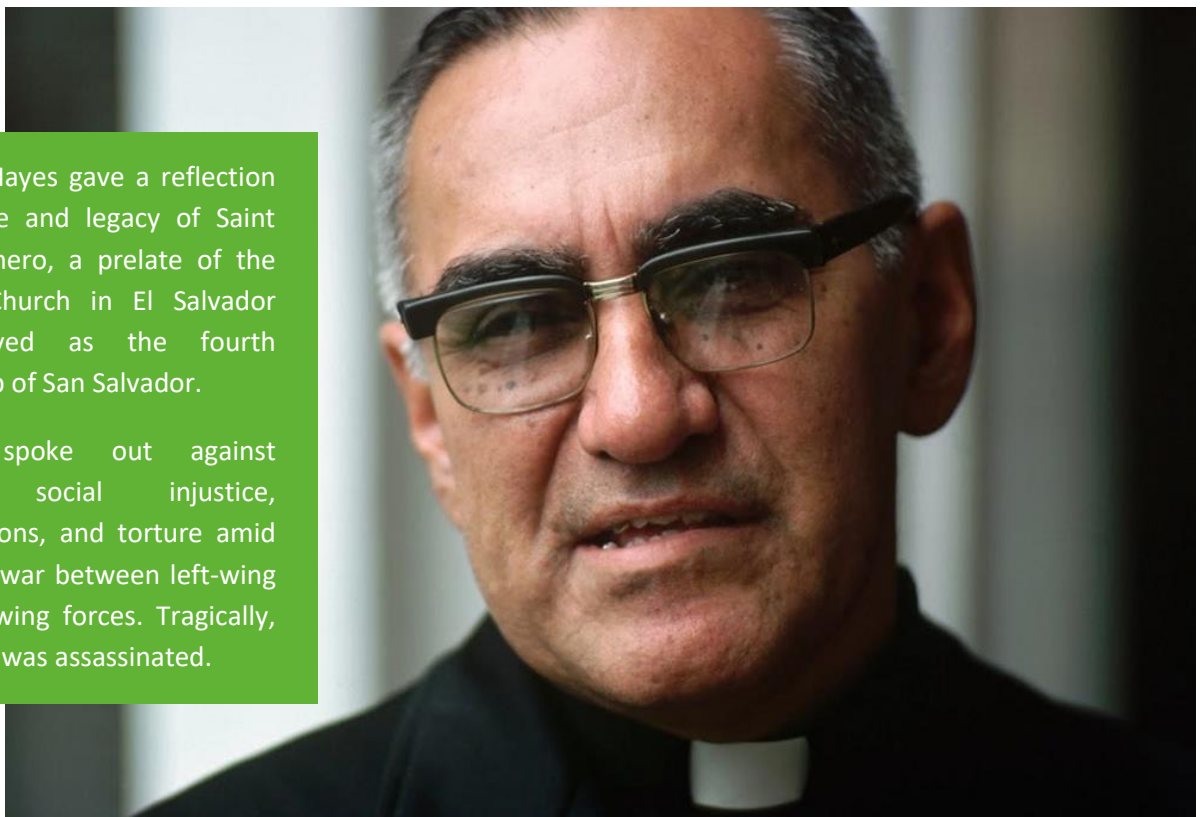
Spirituality of Justice

Looking at the brokenness of our world we might be tempted to ask, "What on earth can I do?" and decide that the answer is "Nothing!" But we are 'Easter People' and we go forth in hope! Fragile and at times isolated individuals though we may be, together we can change the way the world thinks and acts. We can build bridges not walls. The Spirituality of Justice programme, led by Sr Maire Hayes, has had an active year, focused on doing just that.

Reflection on the Life and Legacy of Saint Oscar Romero

Sr Maire Hayes gave a reflection on the life and legacy of Saint Oscar Romero, a prelate of the Catholic Church in El Salvador who served as the fourth Archbishop of San Salvador.

Romero spoke out against poverty, social injustice, assassinations, and torture amid a growing war between left-wing and right-wing forces. Tragically, in 1980 he was assassinated.



Sr Maire's reflection was offered to members of the Roman Catholic community in Luton at Holy Ghost Parish on 6th March 2019 and also to the Luton Council of Faiths on 12th March 2019 (pictured below left). It was a further privilege to welcome the Archbishop Odama of Uganda on 11th October 2018 (pictured below right), who spoke of his work for justice in his country and, like Romero, has suffered death threats because of his public stance. These men number among our modern-day prophets.



Holocaust Memorial Day 2019

Luton's Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration was held at the University of Bedfordshire on 24th January 2019 with the theme "Torn from Home". As always, the event was very well attended, this year having an increased presence of young people both participating and in the audience, plus a diverse mixture of people supporting the evening. Particularly striking was a drama contribution performed by pupils of Stopsley High School, illustrating the suffering of the Jewish people and other victims of the Holocaust during the Second World War. A survivor of the Rwandan Genocide also gave his moving testimony. Occasions such as these are hugely important to remind us that such history must not be allowed to repeat itself, especially given the current rise in anti-Semitism in the UK.



Reflection Days

Sr Maire Hayes led two Reflection Days for women's groups – one in Abergavenny on 19th May 2019 and the other in Northampton on 26th May 2019, each attended by 25 women. The theme was based on the Encyclical Laudato Si - how our faith helps us to care for our common home, the Earth. The reflection days acknowledged that while climate change is a global crisis, we can all be active in making changes to our lifestyles as individuals. Attendees were reminded that there are two ways in which we affect the rest of creation - by what we use and also by what we throw away. We need to think about this in all our living contexts. Both reflection days were fruitful with lots of engaging discussion and action planning, concluding with creation-themed liturgies.



World Day of Prayer

The Preparation Day for the World Day of Prayer (formerly known as the Women's World Day of Prayer) took place on 28th January 2019, and was supported by Sr Maire Hayes. This year's celebration was prepared by the women of Slovenia, with the theme 'Come – Everything is Ready' - an open invitation for all to come to God's table. The voices of wives, mothers, grandmothers, Roma people, refugees and migrant workers were amongst many others which contributed to the prayer resource, reflecting on the political and economic situation and difficulties in Slovenia from the time of the communist state to the present day. Two separate World Day of Prayer services were held on the 1st March 2019 at St Francis Church and then St Luke's Church, drawing on these stories.



Fairtrade Activities

GRASSROOTS teamed up with St Christopher's Church, Luton, during Fairtrade Fortnight to hold a Fairtrade Cake Bake Competition on 23rd February 2019 (pictured below left). All the cakes had to be made with at least three Fairtrade ingredients, and were judged on taste and presentation. The twenty entries included submissions from people of different faith backgrounds, including Christians, Muslims and Hindus. This was dialogue and fellowship with a difference! Our work in schools also continued with Fairtrade Assemblies (pictured below right), delivered in partnership with Luton Council of Faiths. Participating schools were presented with Fairtrade footballs to add to their PE supplies. MEP Alex Mayer, a strong supporter of Fairtrade and of our local Fairtrade campaign, joined us at St Margaret of Scotland RC School on 1st March 2019, presenting footballs on our behalf.



The GRASSROOTS Fairtrade Stall was present during a 'Live Advent Calendar' event on 1st December 2018, the World Day of Prayer service at St Francis Church on 1st March 2019, and at the Precious Pearls celebration on 7th March 2019, promoting awareness of Fairtrade and helping to support farmers and producers around the world. GRASSROOTS is proud to continue offering a range of Fairtrade goods for sale to the local community, and during 2018-19 half a tonne of Fairtrade Medjoul dates were sold, mainly for Ramadan and Eid celebrations.

Supporting Women and Standing in Solidarity

The Luton All Women's Centre invited Sr Maire Hayes to help plan and support an initiative to network all the women's groups based in the town, seeking to foster mutual awareness and support, and to promote closer working. Further activities have included two significant events held in October 2018. 'Women of our Era', a multicultural and multifaith event organised by the One Stop Centre, focused on the suffragette movement at the beginning of the last century, also exploring what women want today - such as economic justice, racial justice and the ending of violence against women. Azalea, a Christian charity working to support sex workers in Luton, also held an event to discuss the subject of sex work, examining how and what support could be given to women engaged in the sex industry, and identifying the underlying reasons women may find themselves here - such as funding a drug habit, needing to feed their families, or being in the hands of pimps who exploit their vulnerability.

Much of the work of the Spirituality of Justice project includes attending significant events and activities - sometimes actively leading or taking part, sometimes offering support by being a sincere presence. During the year 2018-19, such gatherings included a meeting with Alex Mayer MEP on 16th November 2018 discussing Brexit and its effects; Chanukah Celebrations (commemorating the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem in the second century BCE) on 10th December 2018; the Forum of Churches Together in Bedfordshire, featuring a Coptic Orthodox Archbishop as keynote speaker on 9th May 2019; and an Introduction to Islam and Muslim Culture Day held on 24th April 2019 at the Madinah Mosque in Luton. Whilst many of these occasions were celebratory or educational, there was also the need to stand in solidarity at times of grief following the appalling terrorist attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, on churches in Sri Lanka and on a synagogue in San Diego, USA. In Luton, these attacks have brought many people together from all backgrounds, to join in condemning extremism in all forms, in prayers for one another, in demonstrations of mutual solidarity, in condolence for those bereaved, in restating the need to condemn extremist violence in the strongest terms, and in continuing to work together with ever greater urgency against ignorance, prejudice and hatred.

Conferences

Sr Maire Hayes has continued to play a key role in helping to plan conferences for a number of religious bodies, both in Luton and beyond. In the year 2018-19 these have included:

Forgotten People Forgotten Places – Being Church on the Margins

Organised by the National Justice and Peace Network (NJPN,) and held from 26th to 28th July 2019 in Swanwick (Derbyshire), Forgotten People Forgotten Places was Chaired by former MP John Battle, and attended by more than 200 people. Guest Speaker, Prof Anthony G. Reddie, who writes extensively on Black Theology in grassroots communities, explored a number of topics including theologising Brexit, deconstructing the myths of racial purity, white marginalization and urban poverty in Britain. Anthony challenged attendees to “resist xenophobia and be the signs of hope in tribal Britain”, warning that narrow fractional nationalism had emerged since Britain opted to leave the EU. He called on people to tell a new story about ourselves as British people - not the one focused on the imagined glories of the past, and reflected on the hope he found in grassroots church communities where faith has prompted people to broaden their outlook and be more inclusive of those on the margins of mainstream society. Two workshops delivered by a group called 'Inclusive Church' focussed on the themes of 'Disability' and 'Sexuality and Gender' in relation to the Gospels, whilst further workshops explored working with refugees in a hostile environment and the role of social media in highlighting forgotten people and places.

Re-imagining Britain: Freedom and Equality as a Way to Social Justice

Held on 6th October 2018 in Euston (London), this NJPN conference featured Revd Paul Hackwood as the keynote speaker. Paul, Executive Director of the Church Urban Fund, shared reflections on working through relational partnerships to bring about long-term, sustainable change by mobilizing local people to be a source of the change they want to see. This is the approach for much of GRASSROOTS' work, particularly in the Real People Honest Talk programme (see Page 21). GRASSROOTS colleague Kim Greig also spoke, illustrating the theme with reference to different aspects of work enabled by Near Neighbours in Luton.



Trafficking – Modern Day Slavery

Organised by the Religious for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), this conference was held on 13th October 2018 at St John's Church in Luton. The conference was very well attended, with over sixty participants representing all parts of the Diocese. Sr Patricia Mulhall spoke about the exploitation of vulnerable people which nets an income for the profiteers of \$150 billion a year - on a par with the global arms trade. Attendees heard how people from Eastern Europe and Africa, dreaming of a better life for themselves and their families, are lured into a life of servitude and suffering. They form the workforce of car washes, massage parlours, domestic workers, cleaners, building sites, begging, drug mules and more. One million children enter the sex trade globally every year, while India sees the harvesting of human organs for sale to the rich. Participants were shocked by these facts, highlighting the need to be alert, and to raise awareness of this issue that is around us. All were encouraged to offer financial support to agencies working to end this exploitation, advocate and lobby our MPs to enforce the 2013 Modern Day Slavery Act and the 1999 Palermo Agreement – “Men and Women are not for sale”.

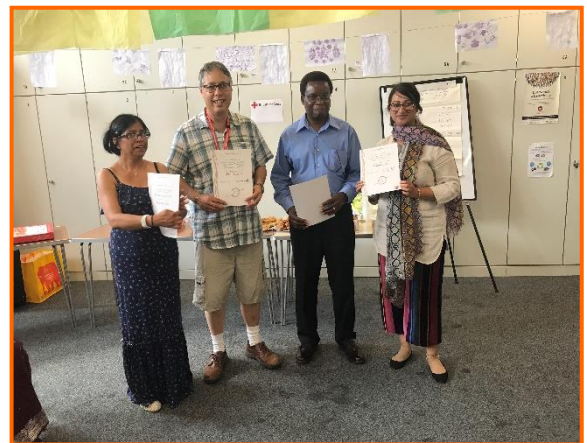
Signs of Hope – Seeking Life in Troubled Times

Sr Maire served on the planning committee of this annual conference for the Religious of England and Wales, which took place from 5th to 7th April 2019 at Hoddesdon (Hertfordshire). Keynote speaker, Revd Al Barret, Rector of Hodge Hill Anglican Church in Birmingham, presented an image of being on a journey of community-building with his multi faith neighbours. In so doing, Al aims to bring together theory, action, politics and theology. The conference was an energising weekend of reflection, sharing, learning and mutual support. The forty participants were invited to enter the stages of Experience – Analysis – Reflection – Action, contemplating how this cycle can help in negotiating the realities of our world today. One particular focus considered the temptations of Jesus in His ministry, prompting conference participants to reflect on the temptations we face in our respective ministries today. Which of these temptations do we recognise as being most seductive for us?

The Near Neighbours Luton Hub, led by Kim Greig, had another busy and successful year. Work in Luton included a series of four local Real People Honest Talk groups, with the subsequent 'Big Conversation' bringing the smaller groups together with members of the wider community for mutual sharing. There has been a continuation of the small grants programme and the local launch of the exciting 'Places of Welcome' movement, which will continue to blossom and grow. We are delighted to share that the government has continued to fund Near Neighbours until March 2020.

Small Grants Programme

Project grant applications have been as popular as ever. During May 2018 to February 2019, twenty-eight Luton-based projects were funded with a total of £114,467 being awarded. It has been a joy for the Local Coordinator to visit many of these successful projects, and to be involved from the start of the application process to seeing the projects being delivered. One example of the exciting work enabled by Near Neighbours small grants is the Visually Impaired People (VIP's) Cooking Project (pictured below left). Kim offered support from the very conception of the project, hearing the ideas, working beside Phil and Chris (visually impaired project leads from the group), to prepare the application, then helping to find a project coordinator to assist in its delivery!



During the period covered by this report the small grants programme has supported numerous initiatives including the British Red Cross Refugee and Asylum Seeker English Language Course (pictured above right); a Luton Windrush Celebration; the Community Cohesion Champions Mental Health Awareness Day for young people (pictured below); work to set up the Luton Community BME Network; Community Nursing in Stopsley; an Introduction to Patchwork & Quilting and beginners ESOL classes run by Shanthona; The Big Music Company's community choir and Bohemian Rhapsody flash mob; and St Paul's Church new community cafe, seeking to build links with it's neighbours.



Real People Honest Talk

Real People Honest Talk (RPHT) is a Near Neighbours initiative gathering people of diverse backgrounds to share honest conversations about their local communities - exploring what is required to live well together, identifying the difficult issues, and planning together how they might respond. Following the success of the pilot programme in 2017 (based in Luton and the Black Country), the programme was repeated and expanded to include Blackburn and Bradford. Four groups were delivered in Luton between September to December 2018:

Tokko Youth Centre (with InterAct and RotarAct youth groups – both based at Tokko)



Shri Guru Ravidass Sangat (Sikh Temple) and Att10tive



Bury Park Beech Hill Community and the Luton Irish Forum



High Town Methodist Community and Purpose Driven Trust



Each round of RPHT conversations was vibrant, heartfelt, and frequently funny, as people vented their frustrations and shared each other's pain. Issues explored included the joys and challenges of religious and cultural diversity, negative perceptions of Luton, drugs and prostitution, traffic and parking, safety, knife crime, education, homelessness and youth services.

The popularity and positive impact of Real People Honest Talk on local communities so demonstrated the effectiveness and need for the programme that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government decided to fund all ten Near Neighbours areas across England to deliver the programme by the end of 2019 – each Hub to deliver four groups of three sessions followed by a 'Big Conversation'.

The Big Conversation

The Real People Honest Talk programme culminated in our second 'Big Conversation' event on 5th December 2018 (pictured below left and right) featuring open cafe-style table discussions and a community panel comprising Cllr Aslam Khan (Portfolio Holder for Place and Infrastructure, Public Health, Sports and Arts at Luton Borough Council); Dr Joan Bailey MBE (former Councillor and Executive Director of the Safer Luton Partnership); Cllr Andrew Malcolm (Portfolio Holder for Finance at Luton Borough Council and Chair of the Board of Directors of London Luton Airport); and Stephen Mosley (Community Sergeant and serving as a member of the Community Cohesion Team at Bedfordshire Police). The event was hugely successful, with over 80 people in attendance, and many questions asked and answered pertaining to community concerns and local government policy.



Places of Welcome

August 2018 saw Near Neighbours begin support of the national Places of Welcome initiative, a growing network of hospitality offered by local community groups who want to make sure that everyone in their area has a place to go for a friendly face, a cup of tea and a conversation. This fits well with the Near Neighbours ethos of bringing people together. Over the past year Places of Welcome have opened at All Saints Church (pictured below left), Oakdale Methodist Church - a collaboration of the Bury Park Beech Hill Council of Churches (pictured below right), and Age Concern Luton.



Strengthening Communities Award

On 1st February 2019, Bedfordshire Police held their fifth Community Cohesion Awards Ceremony. The event took place at the Luton Hoo Hotel, with over 500 people invited to share in what was a very pleasant and engaging evening. The Near Neighbours Luton Hub was honoured and privileged to receive the Strengthening Communities Award for the work it does in the town.

A Reception with the Queen

On 25th June 2019, Near Neighbours joined with various local faith and belief groups from across the UK in attending a reception at Buckingham Palace hosted by HRH Queen Elizabeth II. The event celebrated the wide range of work being done to bring local communities together.



Six members of Luton's diverse faith communities (including 3 Christians, 2 Muslims and 1 Sikh) who have been involved in delivering Near Neighbours initiatives or Near Neighbours funded projects joined Kim Greig and nearly 200 other guests for the special occasion. Most graciously, Her Majesty took the time to greet each guest personally - most certainly the highlight of the event. It was a joy for our local attendees to represent Luton and the wonderful work that takes place in the town!

Celebration at the House of Lords

On 29th January 2019, Near Neighbours hosted a reception at the House of Lords to celebrate and appreciate the success of local community groups in promoting positive integration and challenging hate and intolerance - particularly those groups who have been involved with Near Neighbours projects.



Friends, partners, faith leaders, activists, politicians and colleagues were hosted as guests by Baroness Eaton OBE, with each Near Neighbours Hub having been asked to invite community members who have been involved in delivering funded projects and local initiatives. The Luton contingent included partners from Tokko Youth Centre, Luton Irish Forum, Luton Council of Faiths, Att10tive Social Enterprise, the Shri Guru Ravidass Sangat (Sikh Temple) and GRASSROOTS.

Offering Support

Being part of the GRASSROOTS team gives opportunity for the Near Neighbours Luton Hub Coordinator to support various events and initiatives. On 6th October 2018, this included spending the day with GRASSROOTS colleague Sr Maire Hayes at a Links Conference with the Catholic community in London, where Paul Hackwood (Executive Director of the Church Urban Fund which administers Near Neighbours) was the keynote speaker. This gave opportunity to share Near Neighbours grant information, and consequently led to a successful grant application by the Christian Kitchen from Walthamstow who were present at the conference!

A new Near Neighbours Hub was opened in Peterborough in December 2018. The Luton Hub hosted a visit by the new Peterborough coordinator, helping to brief her on everything related to Near Neighbours. Kim Greig has continued supporting her new colleague, including at the Peterborough Hub briefing day for community projects.

In April 2019 we heard the sad news of Cyclone Idai hitting the east coast of Africa - in particular Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, and specifically affecting the coastal town of Beira in central Mozambique. Beira is the town where Kim Greig, Luton Hub Coordinator, was posted for over three years from 2000, when working with Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO). She had arrived to help with the clean-up operation following floods which saw two thirds of Mozambique under water, killing thousands and devastating towns. On this occasion, with the kind support of GRASSROOTS, a Cyclone Idai fundraising campaign was created, raising over £1,100 to help the relief efforts. Thank you to everyone who was able to donate or share awareness of this cause.

Inter Faith Relations



The foundations of our work predominantly rest upon the building and strengthening of relationships with individuals and institutions from across diverse ecumenical, religious, cultural and professional backgrounds. It would be easy to spend all our time networking, maintaining and strengthening relationships. Lack of funding and resources, however, mean that we have to direct some of our focus and energies into fundraising to continue our work. Thankfully, GRASSROOTS' self-critical reflective practices have challenged us to keep a healthy balance in our priorities, reminding us not to do anything at the cost of our all-important relationships. This demands lots of time, energy, patience and grace, and has been as important as ever during 2018-19.

Partnership with FEAST

The Feast programme brings together young people of different cultures and beliefs to share their thinking and understanding so that each person can become a better citizen in today's challenging society. The programme enables young people to explore and express their faith in company with other young people from diverse faith traditions, facilitating open and honest discussions about the similarities and differences they encounter. These personal faith conversations, based on mutual vulnerability and respect, open the doors for the formation of new and lasting friendships. GRASSROOTS has partnered with Feast to help promote its 10 Principles and Guidelines for Dialogue in Luton's schools, empowering young people to engage well across difference.



Peace Walk 2018

The Annual Luton Peace Walk 2018 was both inspiring and energising. The procession of walkers visited the Luton Salvation Army and The Tree House University Chaplaincy, also calling in at two new places of worship for the first time - Quaker Meeting House and BAPS Swami Narayan Hindu Mandir. During one stop local mother, Roseann Taylor, gave an impassioned appeal calling for action against Luton's growing knife-crime which claimed the life of her only son. Elsewhere, it was inspiring to see the participation of five Luton schools. Despite financial challenges, the Peace Walk has become an iconic activity for many schools, with teachers and children alike keen to engage with the themes during preparatory assemblies and activities, and to participate on the day.



Luton Faith Assemblies

Organised by Luton Council of Faiths in preparation for the Annual Peace Walk, GRASSROOTS partnered in delivering twelve assemblies in Luton primary schools in June 2019. Presented as a BBC News Special, the assemblies addressed 'The Big Question: What would make our town more respectful?'. Each assembly saw a multifaith panel of community representatives (from Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Baha'i and Jewish traditions) explaining key points of their respective faiths, contemplating what contributions their particular traditions make to the furthering of respect and peaceful coexistence in Luton and beyond, then fielding wide-ranging questions from the studio audiences - the gathered schoolchildren - who offered their own brilliant ideas for making Luton a better place.





Hats of Faith and Multifaith Storytelling

The 'Hats of Faith' project draws on the belief that early familiarity with faith-based customs and diversity will lead to kinder and more understanding future generations. Delivered as part of the build up to the Peace Walk, the project helps children to learn about different religious head coverings and to discover customs which may be shared across many faith traditions.



Multifaith storytelling sessions were also delivered across schools in Luton (pictured above), sharing values and virtues through colourful, fun and engaging performances by the Khayaal Theatre Company. The sessions help to build bridges and generate a better understanding of different faiths and cultures, highlighting mutual links and crossovers, and exploring British values.

Muslims greet Christians at Churches Together in Luton (CTL) AGM

This year's AGM of Churches Together in Luton (pictured below) received visitors from Luton Central Mosque. Tanvir Munir (General Secretary) and Haji Mohammed Shafait (President) reflected: "Following the terror attacks in New Zealand and Sri Lanka, it is important for us to share our solidarity with one another. We are here to share the pain of our Christian brothers and sisters."



Addressing Monsignor Kevin McGinnell, Parish Priest at Holy Ghost Catholic Church, Mr Shafait said, "I live on this street, so we are neighbours. It is our duty that we share our joys and sorrows together." Michael Singleton, Chair of CTL, expressed appreciation for the kind gestures of Muslim friends and neighbours, reflecting on the Bible commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Bringing Hope Out of Despair

Sadly, the past year was scarred by appalling terrorist attacks on two mosques in Christchurch New Zealand, then on Churches in Sri Lanka, followed by a hate crime committed in a Synagogue in San Diego. Far from causing division, however, in Luton these attacks brought many people together, from all backgrounds, to join in condemning extremism in all forms, in prayers for one another, and in demonstrations of mutual solidarity. At GRASSROOTS' invitation people twice gathered outside Luton Town Hall in support for each other, to express condolences for those bereaved, and to pledge their commitment to continue working together with greater urgency against ignorance, prejudice and hatred.

Following the attacks in New Zealand, Churches Together in Luton shared a message of support with local Muslims saying 'over the past ten years, since the formation of the far-right English Defence League, extremists have sought to polarise us, but we have stood together to condemn all hatred and bigotry. We'll continue to do so and we'll do it together, never giving up on one another'. All Churches were encouraged to display banners saying "We love our Muslim Neighbours – You are not alone." The gesture was reciprocated following the attacks in Sri Lanka. In a message to local Christians, Luton and Sunni Councils of Mosques said "We stand united with all in grief and in resistance to hate and violence. It is particularly abhorrent that these attacks were carried out on a day which holds so much significance to Christians. We utterly reject all ideologies of hatred and division." Muslim youngsters also distributed leaflets and posters in Luton Town Centre saying "We love our Christian Neighbours – You are not alone."

Ecumenical Updates

Efforts to share with and learn from Christians of different denominational backgrounds are crucial to help develop closer relationships and better understanding. In the context of the work of GRASSROOTS, this has remained a challenging yet deeply enriching endeavour.

Church of Sweden Clergy Placement Programme in Diocese of St Albans

Sweden is believed to be one of the top ten happiest countries in the world. One report suggests the reason is “they trust one another, foster communities, and feel gratitude”. There seems to be a shared sense of responsibility to take care of each other. GRASSROOTS was privileged to experience these sentiments in action during a visit to Sweden in September 2018, organized by the Church of Sweden Diocese of Linköping, as part of the Erasmus funded Swedish Clergy Placement Programme in the Church of England Diocese of St Albans.



Swedish Clergy visiting Guru Nanak Gurudwara in Luton as part of their Placement Programme in the UK



Swedish Clergy share in Devotions after a field visit during their Placement Programme in the UK



UK Clergy enjoy a visit to the Portalen organisation working with newly arrived migrants in Sweden



UK Clergy given a tour of the Linköping Cathedral, the episcopal seat of the Diocese of Linköping in Sweden

Like many European countries, Sweden has experienced a sharp rise in anti-immigrant sentiment, and its far-right political movement is on the rise. In response to these dynamics, the Church of Sweden initiated the Clergy Placement Programme, seeking to foster greater knowledge in the areas of social cohesion, interfaith work and projects for vulnerable groups so the Church can be better equipped to engage with newly arrived migrants. Working with GRASSROOTS, Swedish colleagues were placed in eight different locations in the St Albans Diocese, exploring themes of relationships, hospitality, warmth, openness, wisdom, respect and commitment. One of the participants reflected “When people from different religious and cultural backgrounds really meet and share their lives, differences turn out to be advantages and not threats”.

Archdeacon Paul Hughes Farewell Visit

After a ministry spanning thirty-six years as curate, Vicar and Archdeacon, the Venerable Paul Hughes, Archdeacon of Bedford since 2003 and based in Luton, retired on 31st December 2018. Paul has been a longstanding supporter and well-wisher of GRASSROOTS and of Luton Council of Faiths. It was a pleasure for office bearers from both organisations to pay Paul a cordial visit at his home, wishing him well for his life after retirement. Paul is succeeded as Archdeacon of Bedford by the Venerable Dave Middlebrook, who was formally welcomed in a service held on 30th March 2019.

Meetings with Regional Church Leaders

It is encouraging that during 2019 a number of regional Church Leaders visited GRASSROOTS, extending their personal support and assurances for our work, including:

- Revd Dr Andrew Prasad (pictured right), Moderator of the Thames North Synod of the United Reformed Church
- Revd Dr David Chapman, Beds, Essex & Herts Methodist District Chair; and
- Revd Dr Richard Atkinson, Bishop for Bedford and Luton in the (Church of England) Diocese of St Albans

It is hugely important for GRASSROOTS to retain its Christian character and identity and to continue progressing with its desire to work ecumenically. GRASSROOTS was able to further strengthen its ecumenical links through the following:

- Meeting with C of E Vicars newly arrived in Luton - Revd Anne Crosby (St Anne with St Christopher's Church), Revd Jairo Nyaongo (St Augustine's Church) and Revd Nick Mwandia (St Matthews Church);
- St Albans Diocese;
- St Mary's Centre for Peace & Reconciliation; and
- South Bedfordshire Methodist Circuit Staff Team – Induction Day.



GRASSROOTS Reflection Day with Revd Richard Tetlow

GRASSROOTS was delighted to welcome retired Vicar Revd Richard Tetlow to meet with the staff and trustees to share reflections and insights from his recently published book 'Perceptions of Christianity From People of Different Faiths (To see ourselves as others see us)'. In the book, five people, each of a different faith, have shared their perceptions of Christianity and five Christians have responded. Richard helped us reflect on:

- The main emphasis of the book - listening to others and focusing on our human relationships with those around us who are from different and diverse backgrounds;
- Where and how does Christianity - and our personal Christian commitment/calling - come into the picture? Is it complementing or contradicting - and do we recognise when this is so?; and
- How do these reflections relate to GRASSROOTS - the relationships developing within and outside GRASSROOTS as a result of what GRASSROOTS does?

Farewell to 'Mrs Fairtrade'



It has been a privilege for GRASSROOTS to have worked with and alongside Sue Bentley - 'Mrs Fairtrade' - one of the most dedicated and enthusiastic members of the Luton Fairtrade Steering Group. After many years based in Harpenden, Sue is moving on to pastures new as she relocates to Scotland.



Celebrating Fairtrade Fortnight 2019, Sue co-led a Fairtrade Assembly at St Margaret of Scotland Primary School in Luton with GRASSROOTS colleagues - just one of many commitments in the past year. During the assembly she was presented with a Fairtrade Gift Hamper by Alex Mayer MEP.

It was an honour for us that Sue took time to call into the GRASSROOTS office for a chat, and to hand over a bag full of Fairtrade footballs and a lovely 'thank you' card! On behalf of all at GRASSROOTS, and in the Fairtrade Steering Group, we send our best wishes to Sue and her family for their future plans. There is no question that she will be greatly missed.



THANK YOU Sue, for being part of us all. And thank you for all your contributions, your energy, and your passion to serve and promote the cause of Fairtrade in and around Luton. It has been a joy working with you. Stay blessed, healthy and active as ever!

Warm Congratulations



GRASSROOTS congratulates our friend and colleague Ryad Khodabocus, from our partner organisation Luton Council of Faiths (LCoF), who was the proud recipient of three awards this year for his hard work and dedication to interfaith engagement and community development in Luton.

The '21 For 21' Awards were launched jointly by the Church Times, British Muslim TV, and Jewish News, together with Coexist House. Twenty-one young faith leaders for the 21st Century (7 Jews, 7 Christians and 7 Muslims) were chosen to receive awards at Lambeth Palace, for their inspirational and outstanding interfaith work. Ryad was the deserved winner of one of these (pictured below).



During the presentation ceremony, Alastair Stewart OBE of ITV News said “Every day contains news of conflicts between different faiths around the globe. We forget these conflicts are conducted by the minority of people, for the benefit of the minority of people. Majorities across all backgrounds just want to get on with their lives. Respect and cooperation between faiths is the way forward for a more peaceful and collaborative world.” It was, therefore, a great honour for Ryad to be chosen to receive a 21 for 21 Award, out of a pool of more than 100 strong nominations from across the UK, for his innovative and hands-on interfaith work in Luton.

Ryad was also named 'Young Sacred Activist of the Year, 2019' by St Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation in London (pictured below left), in recognition of his ongoing commitment to social change and activism. He received a further award from the High Sheriff of Bedfordshire for Service to the County (pictured below right). In addition to these achievements, for the fourth time in four years LCoF was the winner of the Bedfordshire Police 'Community Cohesion Award' in the Inter-Faith Champion category, whilst Ryad was nominated in the Luton in Harmony category of the Luton's Best Awards. We congratulate Ryad for this well-deserved recognition and hope he will continue to aspire and inspire for a better world.



Conclusion

In conclusion we offer this story: In her graduation speech, an Algerian Harvard student reflected, "As Harvard Graduates we are asked to go into the world and do the most we can, but I am here to ask you to do the least!"

She told how during the civil war in Algeria, her life was changed forever by a man whom she had never met. On one hot summer's day in 1994, her mother had gone to a local market where she learned that the French Government was allowing some Algerians to take refuge in France. All that was needed was to write your name on a list. Her mother desperately wanted to sign that list, which might offer her daughters a better future. But there was one problem - her mother was illiterate. She did not know how to write. Dejected, she was walking away, when suddenly, a man noticed her and ran after her. That man wrote her mother's name on the list.

A few months later the woman's family was fortunate enough to emigrate to France - and years later her daughter was addressing the Harvard Graduation Ceremony. A man's simple gesture of writing a stranger's name on a page had offered the entire family a better life. He would probably never know the difference he had made, but from the small seeds of his goodness had grown fruits of prosperity for the girl's whole family.

That is the real power - the power of doing little things. 'The least we can do' can bring lasting change. From the smallest things can grow inspired people, lasting friendships and stronger communities. As the beautiful banner prepared by Luton primary school children reminds us, 'Peace begins with a smile!' (See picture below)

The Algerian student concluded her speech by saying:

"Of course we must do the most we can do... but we must also do the least we can do, because the least we can do might turn out to be the most significant."

At GRASSROOTS, we seek to do as much as we can in the challenging, ever-changing context of our town and world, but we never lose sight of small, unplanned, 'insignificant' actions. May we all keep doing the least we can!



Was It Worth It?

Tell me, was it worth it,
All the things that you went through -
The scorn, abuse, and loneliness,
The mockery you knew?
The pain you took upon yourself
For those who hung you high?
Tell me, was it worth it?
Were they worth it?
Lord, am I?

Tell me, was it worth it?
Yes, they knew not what they did -
Fickle and misguided,
From their eyes your truth was hid;
But surely you'd have hoped by now
Our minds would open wide,
So truth and hope and justice
Never more be crucified.

My God, oh was it worth it
When you see our world today?
For us you gave your everything -
The 'us' who turn away;
Who find our worth in worldly wealth,
In politics and power;
And offer only sheepish prod
'Gainst evil's looming tower.

Tell me, was it worth it -
Would you do it all again -
Put your very self upon the line
To bear this people's pain?
Still fickle and still foolish -
Blind lead blind till all are lost,
And hope, it seems, is fading -
Was 'this' really worth the cost?



Oh Lord, I wouldn't do it -
And I cannot think now why
Your all was given for 'Hosanna!'
Instant turned to 'Crucify!'
For hearts which still stay hardened;
Minds like tombs, the stones in place,
Denying life for self and others
And rejecting still your grace.

Yet I think I hear you speaking
Even 'midst the doubts and shame -
Not judging or condemning,
Simply calling out my name.
You say "In answer to your question -
Tho I see more than you do -
In a breath I'd do it all again;
It was for this. It was for you."

So as Easter comes around,
As I consider cross and grave,
And I simply can't help wond'ring
'Was it worth all that you gave?'
May my pond'ring turn to action
Born from love you've shown for me,
Helping roll away the stones of death
Till life and hope flow free.

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2018-2019 Financial Summary

Income	£
Grants received	151,430
Donations	19,221
Interest and other income	49
Sale of Fairtrade goods	5,789
	176,489
Expenditure – Charitable activities	
Mission Education and Advancement	60,968
Work with Women across Faiths and Cultures	8,580
Near Neighbours	54,328
Bury Park Beech Hill Church Related Community Work	5,483
Other Events	2,700
	132,059
Governance costs	
Total	3,403
	135,462
Net Expenditure for the year	
Total	(41,027)
Reserves at 31 August 2018	
Unrestricted	42,911
Restricted	26,791

Meet the GRASSROOTS Team and Trustees



David Jonathan

GRASSROOTS Director, Community Cohesion and Inter Faith Relations

Revd Canon David Lawson

Chair of Trustees



Sr Maire Hayes

Spirituality of Justice and Interfaith Coordinator for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton

Sheila Marsden

Secretary



Ann Hyde

Working with Women Across Faiths and Cultures

Brian Roe

Treasurer



Karen Campbell

Church Related Community Worker

Phil Horner

Trustee



Kim Greig

Near Neighbours Coordinator

Janet Bird

Trustee



Ruth Tetlow

Trustee



Deborah Purfield

Trustee



Maggie Hindley

Trustee



We would like to thank Gordon Slater (former Treasurer) for all he has done to support GRASSROOTS over the years as he steps down from his role, but are also delighted to welcome a new Treasurer in the form of Brian Roe and to welcome back Revd Maggie Hindley to the team of trustees!



PEACE