

Summary

The meeting focused on religious persecution and violence, with Phil from Peace Catalyst International peacecatalyst.org/norwich (*We equip and mobilise Christians for collaborative peacebuilding across lines of difference, racial, political, religious*). UN International Day Commemorating Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religious or Belief is on **August 22nd**. Phil shared examples of persecuted religious minorities including the Meskhetian Turks, Christians in North Korea, Baha'is in Iran, and Uyghurs in China, highlighting the ongoing suffering and lack of awareness about these situations. The discussion included insights from participants about religious tensions in India, the Islamic community centre application in Norwich, and the historical context of religious conflicts. Participants shared personal experiences and perspectives on interfaith cooperation, emphasising the importance of understanding, connecting, and collaborating across different faith communities to promote positive peace with justice.

Chat: Ujjal had recently attended a Lions Club International Convention in Hong Kong. He met the CEO of a Sikh humanitarian organization called Sikh Aid, which provides food and services in warm climate locations. Lions Club UK activities include donations of stoves and generators to Ukraine for hospitals without electricity.

Religious Persecution Around the World by Phil Gazeley

As a Peace Catalyst Phil promotes Personal, Community and Faith Community peace between Christians and between Christians and others.

This is through: UNDERSTANDING, CONNECTING, COLLABORATING.

Phil presented slides on religious persecution, highlighting four minority groups suffering significant persecution:

- the **Muslim Meskhetian Turks** (expelled from Georgia by Stalin in 1944 as preparation for invading Turkey) now scattered throughout many countries, including Turkey and the USA.
- **Christians in North Korea**, regarded as outside state-sanctioned religious organisations and challenging the personality cult of North Korean leaders.
- the **Baha'i community in Iran**, persecuted in the country where their religion was founded,
- the **Muslim Uyghurs** (pronounced weejeers) population in northern China, detained in re-education camps, who wish to become a separate country.

Phil shared personal experiences from his work in refugee resettlement and explained how these communities face ongoing challenges including forced relocation, imprisonment, and cultural erasure. The discussion revealed limited prior knowledge among attendees about the Meskhetian Turks and Uyghurs, with participants sharing awareness based on television reports and social media. Phil discussed the persecution of religious minorities in China, particularly the Uyghurs who felt deeply threatened by Chinese government changes and sought separate living arrangements. He explained that while **Christians in China** can practise their religion through the government-controlled Three-Self Patriotic Movement, others choose to meet in underground house churches in resistance to government control.

Ujjal mentioned the similar situation with **Tibetan Buddhists** who are forced to accept Chinese leadership of their religious organisations if they want to be allowed to practise in China.

Gayatri discussed **historical tensions between Hindu and Muslim communities in India**, explaining that while they currently coexist peacefully, current issues stem from historical and political factors and Islamic conversion pressures, for example 90,000 Hindus being forced to leave Kashmir overnight during the post-war Partition between Muslim Pakistan and Hindu India.

Phil suggested ways to support people of other faiths through interfaith collaboration and understanding, sharing examples of successful **cross-faith support in the USA for refugees**. Ujjal advised that when community issues arise, neutral third parties can sometimes be more effective in facilitating humanitarian responses rather than those directly affected by the conflict.

One area of change can come from starting with the problem of “people seeing others as enemies”. Change comes from Humanising others, Listening, Finding places of Connection.

Dereham Road Muslim Community Centre Application in Norwich

The group discussed a current application for a community centre on Dereham Road, with Phil reporting increasing positive developments showing over 100 “pro” comments compared to “against”, creating a majority support. David had read comments expressing concerns about how women would be treated in the Islamic non-worship **community** centre areas. Would they have separate entrances reflecting separate worship spaces for men and women, rather than adapting the rest of the building for mixed socialising. Tom explained that in his experience with Orthodox Judaism, while men and women worship separately, they can still socialise together in the synagogue community spaces, providing reassurance about the community aspect of the centre.

Interfaith Dialogue

The group discussed the origins and history of the **Sikh religion**, with David explaining the founder Guru Nanak's simple message of religious unity had to be adapted by the tenth Guru of the Sikh community, with their dress today originating from Sikhs having to develop as warriors to protect Hindu and Sikh communities from Islamic persecution.

Phil shared insights about **Martin Luther King's** concept of "positive peace" versus "negative peace," emphasising the need for peace with justice.

David concluded by reflecting on how in the 1960's and 1970's the teaching of the Bible and Christianity in schools was disappearing as education and government reacted to a society where **religious belief was seen as no longer relevant for pupils to learn as a preparation for adult life**. But the arrival of people from Africa and Asia with religions involving colourful festivals, exotic food, symbolic dress and daily religious practices, stimulated an appetite for understanding the range of experiences and evidence of religion on show. While this also laid bare the range of differences between religions, the **new school curriculum** came alive with living examples of individuals, families, communities and countries who took their religions seriously and the need for knowledge of which has become essential to successful integration in a modern diverse society. There are still places in the UK and elsewhere where religions are seen as threats to the state or to a dominant national religion or targeted by political groups, but this underlines the **importance today of interfaith dialogue and action in promoting understanding** about, as well as between and within, different faith communities, to ensure social cohesion.

Phil will:

- Conduct a fundraiser on Facebook for the Uyghur Wellness Initiative on 22nd August.
- Keep the Norwich Interfaith group updated on future Peace Catalyst International events and opportunities for roundtable discussions.

Interfaith members are invited:

- To consider supporting the Norwich Islamic Centre application on the City Council website by submitting a note of support.
- To attend the Hindu temple Summer Fair on the Acle Straight on Sunday 6th September.

August 18th 2026