



## YORK INTERFAITH NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2022

Dear Friends

Although February hopefully brings us to the beginning of spring, we may yet have a few snow flakes as well s snowdrops! When we look at the calendar of Religious Festivals, there does seem to be slightly less than in most other months, so I was particularly grateful to Varsha for her contribution about Vasant Panchami.

For those of you who were able to make the zoom meeting in January, we were treated to three personal accounts of a 'Faith Journey'. This made me realise that everyone has a story to tell, and while you yourself may not think of your own story as being of particular significance, other people may find it truly enlightening. So, as editor, I am inviting you to tell your story for others to read in our newsletter. If you feel you could share your 'Faith Journey' in a short piece of writing, please submit something to me for next, (or following) months issues.

Anne Castle

**OUR FEBRUARY MEETING WILL BE A VIRTUAL MEETING USING ZOOM**

**TUESDAY FEBRUARY 1st at 7.30pm Join from 7.20 onwards**

### **The Engagement of Interfaith in Schools**

**Speaker** - David Hampshire, former Vice-Chair of the Interfaith Network.

**Chair: Patricia Harriss**

A zoom link will be sent via email to those on our email list. For anyone new to York Interfaith Group who wishes to attend then please email [yorkinterfaithgroup@gmail.com](mailto:yorkinterfaithgroup@gmail.com).

## Vasant Panchami 5th February 2022



Vasant Panchami, also known as **Saraswati Puja**, Shree Panchami, or the Basant Festival of Kites is a Sikh and Hindu festival held on the fifth day of the traditional Indian calendar month of Magha (usually early February).

The festival marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring - Vasant Panchami means the fifth day ('Panchami') of Spring ('Vasant'). It takes place 40 days before Holi and marks the start of preparations for that festival.

On this day Hindus worship **Saraswati Devi, the goddess of wisdom, knowledge, music, art,** and culture. Legend has it that Lord Brahma had created the earth and humans, but felt it was all a bit too quiet, so on this day, he created Saraswati by sprinkling some water in the air. As she came from water, she is also called the water deity. Saraswati then filled the world with beautiful music and blessed the world with her voice.

Saraswati has four hands which symbolize ego, intellect, alertness and the mind. She is often pictured seated on a lotus or a peacock, wearing a white dress.

**The colour yellow is strongly associated with Vasant Panchami**, representing the fields of mustard which a common sight in the Punjab and Haryana areas at this time of year. People wear bright yellow clothes and cook colourful food to mark the beginning of spring, with many of the dishes cooked being yellow, such as "meetha chawal", sweetened rice, flavoured with saffron.

Like Markar Sankranti, Kite flying is a popular custom associated with this festival, particularly in Punjab and Haryana. Flying kites on this day signifies freedom and enjoyment.

## Anne's Faith Journey

Having invited you all to 'share', I felt I probably should lead by example, so, for what it's worth this is my story.

Born in the fifties, to parents who had survived the war and moved away from London to the new town of Welwyn Garden City, I grew up in a 'Liberal Christian' family with Dad a Baptist, Mum, Church of England and two bothers who were 'rebels'. The town,(or where I lived on the council estate,) was full of young families and much of it was still a building sight. The Baptist church where I attended Sunday school, and later 'Junior Covenanters' consisted of a rented school hall and some rooms in the manse where 'Sister Jenny' lived. I have very fond memories of this time with good friends, parties, shared Sunday tea and lots of singing, especially those choruses! I still sometimes think "Jesus wants me for a sunbeam", but why??? At last we actually got a church building with the Baptismal pool and everything. and then....well, I began to have opinions and announced there was no way I was getting baptised by full emersion. To their credit my parents never argued about this and when at 12 years old I decided to be a Methodist they supported me in that choice and took their turn in hosting the Youth Group meetings on Sunday evenings. If I am completely honest, my friend and I really just wanted to be in that club because there were 'boys' there, but during that time we had the guidance of two wonderful leaders who, I truly believe shaped my life, character and faith journey as much as my parents. Janet and Colin became my mentors and friends. When Janet talked about her work as a primary teacher at one Sunday service, I knew that was what I was going to do and I have worked with children since 1976, so I guess it was the right choice! Colin had an amazing approach to our meetings at which we were free to express our opinions, fears and doubts in a caring and loving situation. And I suppose at this this point, I should mention that it was at this group I met my husband of 42 years so that worked out well too! Although I had, and still have, great reservations about certain religious practices like taking 'Communion' and other ceremonies, I always remember Colin telling me, it's just an outward showing of an inward grace, which made perfect sense. So I was baptised (not in a pool!) with my friend Carolyn. Now I have to tell you that the Minister at that point was a lovely but rather elderly gentleman and as we knelt at the altar, I was actually baptised 'Carolyn Mary' as was my friend!! so just as well about the outward showing of an inward grace thing. There is going to be one big administrative headache if I ever get to the 'pearly gates', so let's hope St Peter is organised! I left home at 18 and went to teacher Training College. I was taking Art as a main subject but that didn't work out as my tutor didn't like blue,( don't ask...) so I ended up in the Divinity class, and there began my education about World Religions as opposed to Christian denominations. And I found it fascinating, enlightening and liberating. During my teaching career interspersed with bringing up three children of my own, I continued to explore Faith as a Sunday school teacher (Briefly) and as Religious Education Coordinator in my last job. As a family we continued to attend various Christian Churches depending where we lived. We specifically chose not to have our children baptised and have always allowed them to make their own choices. So, remember the two rebel brothers?? I think we now have three rebel children, but I have no doubt of their respect for the faith and beliefs of others and we often have interesting discussions when we are together about Life, the Universe and Everything.

So where am I now on the journey? Well, if I am asked ,What Faith? I would have to say Christian as I have always known a 'presence' but there are things about the Christian Faith that I don't necessarily accept as essential because they actually don't matter to me, however some of these things are pretty fundamental, so I'm not sure if I'm a 'real' Christian or not?? What I really find interesting is the fundamental things that I find in all Faiths. Perhaps this is just about being a human? Is my moral compass directing from within, or is it from the 'presence' I referred to earlier? Life is full of questions still and that is what I find exciting

## RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS February 2022



### 1 February (Tuesday) IMBOLC/CANDLEMAS Pagan

Imbolc/Candlemas celebrates the awakening of the land and the growing power of the Sun. Snowdrops, which appear at this time of the year, are seen as the heralds of spring.



### 1 February (Tuesday) NEW YEAR FESTIVAL/CHUNJIE/YUAN TAN Chinese

Celebrations last for three or more days, and involve fireworks, dances (e.g. the famous Lion Dance) and gifts of paper money, flowers and sweets. Business accounts are settled and all debts paid before the New Year begins.

2022 is the year of the Tiger.



### 2 February (Wednesday) PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE / CANDLEMAS Christian

Congregations hold lighted candles to recall the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, and Mary's following Jewish tradition after the birth of a son. His recognition by the aged Simeon is expressed in the words of the *Nunc Dimittis*.



### 3 February (Thursday) SETSUBUN/BEAN SCATTERING Japanese

The day for the Bean Scattering ceremony, performed both in homes and in temples.



### 4 February (Friday) / 5 February (Saturday) SARASVATI PUJA/VASANT PANCHAMI Hindu

Widely celebrated in North India, this festival marks the beginning of spring. For Hindus it is usually linked with Saraswati, the goddess of learning and the arts. Yellow is her associated colour.



### 14 February (Sunday) ST VALENTINE'S DAY Christian/ National



### 15 February (Tuesday) PARINIRVANA Buddhist

Mahayanists mark the final passing away from this world of Gautama Buddha at Kushinagara, India, at the age of 80. Pure Land Buddhists call this Nirvana Day.



### 15 February (Tuesday) LANTERN FESTIVAL/YUANXIAOJIE/TENG CHIEH Chinese

The Lantern Festival marks the first full moon of the year and the lengthening of the days. Strings of lanterns in various designs are hung up indoors and outside as decoration.



### 16 February (Wednesday) MAGHA PUJA Buddhist

1,250 enlightened disciples came to the Bamboo Grove on the full moon of *Magha*. The Buddha predicted his death and gave a summary of his teachings and a code of discipline which all monks are expected to recite every fortnight. The day is observed with meditation, chanting and listening to sermons.



### 28 February (Monday) / 1 March (Tuesday) MAHASHIVRATRI [Great Shiva Night] Hindu

This is the night on which Shiva is said to perform the cosmic dance, leading from creation to destruction. Many Hindus fast at this time. All-night prayers focus on Shiva and his shrines and statues. Milk is poured on his symbol, the *lingam*.

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York Racial Equality Network - AGM to held online Saturday 12th February 2022 @ 11am

**York Racial Equality Network**

Dear All

Please find below information in regards to our next AGM to be held in February. As time is short and due to possible COVID shielding in many personal circumstances YREN have proposed that their next AGM will be held online on 12<sup>th</sup> February between 11am-12pm, a link for the meeting will be sent in due course.

Please find attached a nomination form, along with the Roles & Responsibilities of a Trustee, if you would like to nominate someone to the Board of Trustees of YREN. As time is short and there is a small chance of not being able to meet people to get proposers and seconders for the nominees, we therefore suggest that the proposer rings around to the get the nominee's permission and do the same for seconding. After obtaining permission from the nominee and seconder, the proposer should then complete the form and send it directly to [info@yren.co.uk](mailto:info@yren.co.uk) by the due date of 25<sup>th</sup> January, which we must adhere to due to timings.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss your nomination, please email [info@yren.co.uk](mailto:info@yren.co.uk) or [chair@yren.co.uk](mailto:chair@yren.co.uk).

We look forward to hearing from you.

Best Wishes

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## **Interfaith National Meeting – 22 March – Save the date**

IFN's National Meeting will be held on Tuesday 22 March. While restrictions are being lifted again in England, the decision has been taken to hold this meeting online because of the continued unpredictability of the pandemic at this time. It is hoped that it will be possible for the AGM, later this year, to be a physical or hybrid meeting.

### **A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR**

As Chair, I continue to value your membership as York Interfaith Group continues to grow as a community. Your feedback is very important us. We constantly try to improve our service so that we can best support your needs and those of your faith. You can contact and/or follow us via:

Facebook—York Interfaith group

Instagram— @yorkinterfaith

Twitter—@Yorkinterfaith

email    yorkinterfaithgroup@gmail.com

If you would like to contribute an article or advertise an event, please email [yorkinterfaithgroup@gmail.com](mailto:yorkinterfaithgroup@gmail.com) Items by February 16<sup>th</sup> to guarantee inclusion please.

Anne Castle,                      Newsletter Editor and Committee Member

Avtar Matharu,                  Chair, YIG