

York Interfaith Group

January 2026



Welcome to the January newsletter

This issue will be quite short, but there is one announcement we have to make up front: our planned January talk has had to be cancelled. There will therefore be no public meeting in January; our first YIG presentation for 2026 will therefore be on Tuesday 3rd February. We all wish our readers a very pleasant and restful break meanwhile, and a happy and successful new year.

Rory Allen, Editor

Message from the Chair

Hello

I am grateful to Mahmood Foroughi for writing a very moving response to the terrorist incident on Bondi Beach which we were able to circulate both to the members of the York Liberal Jewish Group but also to a wide range of partners. The statement was printed in the Press as a letter from YIG which was much appreciated, and we include it also in this newsletter.

At our AGM in December we agreed to explore our legal status and as this will involve reviewing the way we work as an organisation and as a management committee, it felt right that we should meet in person round a table to discuss these important issues for YIG. So I do apologise for cancelling the January Meeting, but I am sure you will all agree that we need to ensure that YIG continues to work effectively on behalf of all our members.

I welcome Mary Callan as our new Secretary. She has big shoes to fill and I want to express my heartfelt thanks to Penny Coppin-Siddall for her sterling work as Secretary over the last year. I am sure she will continue as an active member of the Management Committee.

I wish you all a very happy and peaceful break from all the commercialism which surrounds Christmas, and I look forward to working hard on your behalf as Chair of YIG.

Best wishes, Tina Funnell, Chair

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A Message from York's Interfaith Community

We are heartbroken by the terrible events at Bondi. Our thoughts are with everyone who was harmed, with their families and friends, and with all who are grieving. From here in York, we want to say clearly that we stand alongside the Jewish community and with all people who are affected by hatred and violence.

Across nations and cultures, individuals and communities are targeted because of their religion, ethnicity, identity, or beliefs. From antisemitism to Islamophobia, racism, and other forms of exclusion and hostility, these patterns of hatred continue to claim lives and sow fear. The Jewish community, in particular, has endured a long and ongoing history of being singled out, and we stand in solidarity with all who live under the weight of such threats.

These acts of violence and hatred are signs of something deeper — a disregard of our shared humanity and our deep connection to one another. When one community is attacked, we are all diminished.

As people of many faiths and beliefs here in York, we believe that humanity is one family. Violence and hate grow where fear and division are allowed to take hold, and peace grows when we choose understanding, care, and solidarity instead. Building peace is not only about condemning violence, but about actively nurturing unity in our everyday lives.

Today we grieve with those who are suffering, and we recommit ourselves to standing against all forms of hatred, wherever they appear. We will continue to work, together, for a city and a world where everyone is valued, where difference is not feared, and where no one has to live in fear because of who they are.

We hold all those affected in our hearts.

Planned future YIG talks and events

Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month in the Council West Offices (in fully disabled accessible premises). The Meetings start at 7.00 pm with a moment's silence and finish around 8.30pm. People gather from 6.30-ish for drinks and a time to 'catch up'.

Three main themes: connecting with ourselves, and our faith; engaging with our local communities; reaching out beyond York.				
Three approaches to the meetings: presentation OR speaker input (P), discussion (D), practical activity (A).				
2026	Meeting topic	Theme	Approach	Possible meeting lead/speaker
February	Indigenous religions of Africa; late celebration of world religion day (Sun, 18 Jan 2026) - talk on African religions – pre-Christian days and differences between North & South Africa	World	P	Roy Love Sarah
March	Touch – fabric and touch in faiths: Sufism	Local/Ourselves	A, Panel	Bessie (panel); Alicia
April	Mental Health and Faith	Ourselves	D	Mahmood to lead panel
May	Dance and Movement in faiths-body mind connection	Local/World	A,P	Rabbi to lead and others contribute; Alicia
June	Planning meeting: devise themes and create sub-topics			
July	Sikh Temple visit	Local	A	Avtar Sarah
August	Picnic			TBC
September	Religious faiths in Japan (world)	World	P	UoY and YSJ Japanese Society Alicia
October	Language in faiths;	World/Ourselves	P, D	Alicia and panel

	diversity and silence and ritual; Part B			Bessie
November	Chaplain's role in emergency services.	Local	P	Emma Ward, Operational Training Administrator, Firefighters Lisa Armstrong Andy Hardy Bessie Sarah
December	AGM and meeting on taste and food – food as part of culture and faith celebration	Local /ourselves	A, P	Informal meeting Alicia

Decisions of our AGM on 2nd December

The following is the list of committee officers and members elected at this meeting:

York Interfaith Group Committee 2025	
Member	Responsibility
Tina Funnell	Chair
Dee Boyle	Vice Chair and Interfaith Week planning
Mary Callan	Secretary
Avtar Matharu	Treasurer
Rasha Ibrahim	Press and Publicity Officer
Rory Allen	Newsletter
Varsha Gulati	Hindu Representative
Sarah Hubbard	Jewish Representative
Penny Coppin-Siddall	Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Representative
Mahmood Foroughi	Baha'i Representative
Rory Allen	Christian Humanist Representative

The meeting thanked Penny for her long and tireless service as Secretary, and welcomed Mary Callan who will be stepping into that role.

Reports were received from our Chair, Vice Chair and Treasurer. We took note, with deep gratitude, of the generous donation of £5000 from our late much loved treasurer, Daryoush Mazioum. It was agreed that a tree with dedicatory plaque would be planted in his name during the Tree Care session during Interfaith Week in 2026.

It was agreed that we would look into the possibility of giving the York Interfaith Group some formal status as a legal entity. At present, the YIG is an 'Unincorporated Association', with a constitution, elected officers, and minuted meetings. There was a short discussion about the pros and cons of remaining with the status quo, or opting for an alternative such as becoming a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG), a Charity, a Community Interest Company, or a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

Several individuals expressed an interest in taking part in a small working group, to begin in the New Year, to examine these alternatives – including the alternative of staying as we are – and reporting back to the Committee in due course. (I would be grateful if anyone interested in taking part in this work – not limited to those with experience in this field – would kindly confirm this to me by emailing me at:

r.allen@gold.ac.uk)

We also wish to express our gratitude to Christopher Styles, who ensures that all our meetings are provided with first rate sound and visual facilities. His work is much appreciated.

Faith Leaders Round Table, 10th December

York Interfaith Group was well represented at this meeting, which was held in West Offices and chaired by the Mayor of York and North Yorkshire, and the Deputy Mayor for Policing, Fire and Crime. The meeting was summoned to address 'community cohesion and the tensions we have recently seen in York and North Yorkshire....In recent months we have witnessed rising concerns among our residents'. The aim was to 'discuss how we can work together to build resilience and trust.' This was an exploratory meeting, but it was agreed to meet again in the New Year and take forward the various ideas raised.

Celebrations of Chanukah (14th - 22nd December 2025) in York, 16th and 19th December



16th December

On the evening of 16th December, YIG members and others attended a Chanukah ceremony on the steps of the Mansion House. Rabbi Elisheva Salamo of the York Liberal Jewish Community explained the meaning of Chanukah.

After the victory of the Jewish revolt against the military occupation of Judea by the Seleucids, the priests needed to rededicate the Temple. For that, they needed a supply of ritually pure olive oil to light the menorah lamp, but only one container could be found with the high priest's seal intact, sufficient for just one day. Miraculously, this oil burned for eight days, the time needed to prepare new oil. Chanukah is celebrated over this period, for eight nights. Lighting candles (or oil lamps) on a nine-branched menorah, called a chanukiah, is the central ritual of the festival. One candle is lit on the first night, with an additional candle added each subsequent night, using a helper candle called the shamash. The growing light symbolizes the miracle of the oil, the persistence of Jewish faith, and the triumph of religious freedom over oppression.

In accordance with this tradition we were given small candles in holders so that those closest to the 'helper' candle could light theirs from that source, and they could in turn light the candles of those behind them. We then sang short prayers in honour of the miracle, of thanks for our continuing life, and lastly, a prayer for world peace.

The ceremony reminded me of the Christian tradition of lighting four candles in the weeks between Advent Sunday and Christmas Eve. Perhaps this is another example of the debt Christianity owes to its origins in Judaism. In both cases, the action of spreading the light from one to another is a powerful symbol of how truth and discernment can spread from one person to another, even if slowly, so that it will eventually overcome all attempts to snuff it out, it by those who prefer a world of lies, hatred and violence.



From left to right: Tina Funnell, Avtar Matharu, Rabbi Elisheva, Rory Allen

19th December















A further Chanukah ceremony was held at Clifford's Tower, a site of special significance to the Jewish Community in York, starting at 6.30 pm.

Guests were welcomed by Lilian Coulson and then Rabbi Elisheva led us through the service and the significance of lighting the candles. The Sherriff of York and his consort, the Leader of the Council, York Central and York Outer MPs and the MP for Selby were also present and did readings. The Archbishop of York and Cannon Maggie from the Minster participated in the service. Representatives from the faith groups, and the Deputy Mayor responsible for policing also did readings. As always we sang and danced, and finished the service with wine or fruit juice, breaking the bread, and doughnuts. A wonderful evening of fellowship and celebration, with such strong support and goodwill from the people of York to our Jewish friends and neighbours.

Tina Funnell, Chair





FAITHS	January	February	March	April	May	June	
BAHA'I	18 World Religion Day	25 - 1 Mar Ayyam-i-Ha	2-20 Baha'i Fast 21 Naw-Ruz	21-2 May Ridvan 29 9th day of Ridvan	2 12th Day Ridvan 24 Declaration of the Bab 29 The Ascension of Baha'u'llah		
BUDDHIST	3 Mahayana (New Year) 16 Shinran Memorial Day	8 or 15 Parinirvana * 18 Sonam Losar (Nepal)	3 Magha Puja 15 Hōnen Matsuri 20 Higan	8 Hanamatsuri 13 Theravada New Year	24 Buddha's B.day 31 Vesakha Puja Wesak		
CHINESE	26 Labajie (Laba Festival)	17 Tuan Yuan / Chun Jie (New Year: Horse)	12 Yuanxiaojie (Lantern Festival)	5 Qingmingjie (Tomb Sweeping Day)		19 Duanwuje (Dragon Boat Festival)	
CHRISTIAN	1 Naming of Jesus / Circumcision / Mary Mother of God 6 Epiphany [Ang/RC] 6/7 Christmas Eve/Day [3] 11 Baptism of Christ [Ang] 11 Baptism of the Lord [RC] 18-25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 19 Theophany [3] 25 Conversion of St. Paul	2 Presentation of Christ in the Temple / Candlemas 14 St. Valentine 17 Shrove Tuesday 18 Ash Wednesday 18 Lent Begins [-Easter] 23 Great Lenten Fast [3]	1 St David 6 World Day of Prayer 15 Mothering Sunday 17 St Patrick 19 St Joseph [RC] 22 Passion Sunday 25 Annunciation [Ang/[3]/RC] 29 Palm Sunday	2 Maundy Thursday 3 Good Friday 4 Holy Saturday 5 Easter Sunday 12 Pascha [3] 23 St George	10-16 Christian Aid Week 14 Ascension Day 21 Ascension Day [3] 24 Pentecost / Whit 31 Pentecost [3] 31 Trinity Sunday	4 Corpus Christi Body & Blood of Christ [RC] 12 Sacred Heart [RC] 29 St. Peter and Paul	
HINDU	12 Birthday of Swami Vivekananda 13 Lohri 14 Makar Sankranti / Pongal 23 Vasant Panchami/ Saraswati Puja	15 Maha Shivratri	3/4 Holi 26 Rama Navami	2 Hanuman Jayanti 14 Tamil New Year			
JAIN			3 Holi 31 Mahavir Jayanti	10 Mahavir Janma Kalyanak			
JAPANESE	1 Ganjitsu (New Year)	3 Setsubun (Bean Scattering) 23 Emperor's birthday	3 Hinamatsuri / Dolls Day Festival 15 Hōnen Matsuri 17-23 Higan 20 Shūbun No Hi	29 Showa Day			
JEWISH [1]		2 Tu B'Shevat	3 Purim	2-9 Pesach 14 Yom Hashoah 22 Yom Ha'Atzma'ut	5 Lag B'Omer 22-23 Shavuot		
MUSLIM [2]	16 The Prophet's Night Journey [Isra and Mi'raj]	3 The Night of Forgiveness [Lailat-ul-Bara'ah] 18 Ramadan (till 18 Mar)	16 Lailat-ul-Qadr: Night of Power 20 Eid-ul-Fitr*		25-29 Hajj 27 Eid-ul-Adha	4 Eid-ul- Ghadir 17 Al-Hijra (1448) 26 Ashura	
RASTAFARIAN	7 Ethiopian Xmas Day 19 Timket			12 Easter Day [3] Faskia 21 Groundation Day			
SIKHI	6 Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh 13 Maghi / Lohri		4-6 Hola Mohalla 14 Nanakshahi (Sikh New Year)	14 Vaisakhi/ Baisakhi		16 Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev Ji	
ZOROASTRIAN [PARSEE]	30 Jashn-e-Sadeh [IZ]		11-20 Fravardin [IZ] 21 Jamshedi Noruz [IZ] 22 Ava Mah Parab [S] 26 Khordad Sal [IZ]	20 Adar Mah Parab [S]	22 Zaratosht-no- Diso [S]		
PAGAN / DRUID [4]		1 Imbolc/Candlemas	20 Vernal (Spring) Equinox (Ostara / Alban Eilir)	30 May Eve 30 Beltaine Eve	1 May Day / Beltaine	21 Midsummer Solstice / Litha / Alban Hefin	
Some Other Notable Dates	1 New Year's Day / Hogmanay 18 World Religion Day 27 Holocaust Memorial Day	14 St Valentine's Day	1 St David's Day 17 St Patrick's Day 25 Lady Day	23 St George's Day	1 May Day	21 World Humanist Day 24 Midsummer Day	

(*) Indicates some uncertainty about the date.

☾ [1] Jewish Festivals commence, like Shabbat, at **sunset on the evening of the day prior** to the date shown.

☾ [2] Muslim Festivals begin in the **evening before the Gregorian dates** shown in this calendar.

[3] Indicates a festival celebrated in the Orthodox tradition of the Christian church.

☾ [4] All Baha'i and certain Druid and Pagan festivals also commence in the evening.

[5] IZ, K and S denote three Zoroastrian Calendars: Iranian Zoroastrian, Kadmi and Shahenshai.

