



InterFaith MK

In Memoriam

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Sister Lucy Brydon, A Tribute from

Maggie Greaves, Friend, Co-worker and former Secretary of IFMK

Sister **Lucy Brydon** who died last Sunday, spent the early years of her religious life as a Sister of Mercy in teaching and administrative posts in the north of England and Kenya. In 1988 she joined the Olivetan Benedictine Sisters of Turvey Abbey. She represented the Turvey nuns' community in interreligious matters and was coordinator of the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue commission for Great Britain and Ireland.

These brief words do not even begin to paint a picture of the extraordinary woman that many of us had the pleasure and privilege of knowing. Sr Lucy was a heavyweight of InterFaith Dialogue. Do use the link below to read her **Journey into Interfaith Dialogue 1939 – 2011** in her own words, it is astonishing in its breadth and depth. The other attachment describes her journey to Iran in 2012 and her conversations with Muslim men and women at the Institute for Islamic Studies in Qum. She travelled there at a time when the Foreign Office were advising against it!

Coming from a fervent Roman Catholic family in the rural Northeast of England, she had almost no contact even with other Christian denominations until she went to university but in her adult years she forged relationships with Buddhists, Muslims, Jews and others, sharing retreats and the study of religious texts at a deeply personal level which resulted in what she called an 'enlarging of her heart' which she experienced as she listened to God's word spoken in lives very different from her own.

Sr Lucy had a lively, ongoing interest in the spiritual insights of the Enneagram and that was where I met her on a course at Turvey. I met a down to earth woman, full of compassion and fun, wearing her learning and spirituality lightly but generous in the sharing of it. She loved sweets and detective stories and had not a shred of religiosity about her!

When I facilitated the first meeting of the InterFaith Women's group, Sr Lucy came to share the introduction with Samantha James, a young Buddhist and they made a delightful pair, so different in age and experience. Because of the discipline of the Benedictine Order, Sr Lucy was not always able to attend our InterFaith meetings but when she did, she was always surrounded by friends who could not wait to spend even a short time with her.

We had a towering presence among us, hidden in the garb of the modest, smiling nun. For those of us lucky enough to have known and loved her, she has blessed our lives.

Rest in Peace, dear friend.



Priory of Our Lady of Peace

Turvey Abbey



Official Announcement from Sister Benedict of Turvey Abbey

Dear Members of MK Interfaith:

Sr Lucy died peacefully at Bedford South Wing Hospital at 8.45 on Sunday evening, 23rd August. Sr Zoë and Sr Ruth were with her.

On 15 July, Sr Lucy had a fall in her room at the Abbey and sustained a small fracture in her hip. She was in hospital for a week and then went to Anjulita Court care home in Bedford as she needed nursing care until her hip healed. She was confused before she went, and the confusion became much worse. Because of the current quarantine regulations no one could visit her for a fortnight. When the fortnight was almost over, Sr Lucy fell again at the care home, she was taken to hospital to check if the fall had caused further damage, but it hadn't. The hospital decided that while she was in the hospital they would look into a couple of other health issues that had been developing.

On Thursday 13 August Sr Lucy's health suddenly deteriorated, and in the afternoon the hospital rang to say that she was not responding to treatment. Sr Zoe and Sr Ruth went to the hospital to see her. She looked as if she had only hours to live, but on the following Sunday she opened her eyes and began to be able to communicate with people. This lasted for a few days during which time we were able to visit and communicate with her. She was responding to what was said rather than contributing to the conversation.

She began to go down again and communication ceased. On Sunday afternoon (23rd August) the hospital rang to say she was going down quickly, and that evening she died. As a nursing friend said, Sr Lucy has been ready to 'go home' for a while, she had been getting thinner and thinner and more and more confused.

Sr Lucy, born on the 4th December 1939, was in the 63rd year of her religious profession, and in her 30th year as a member of the community at Turvey Abbey.

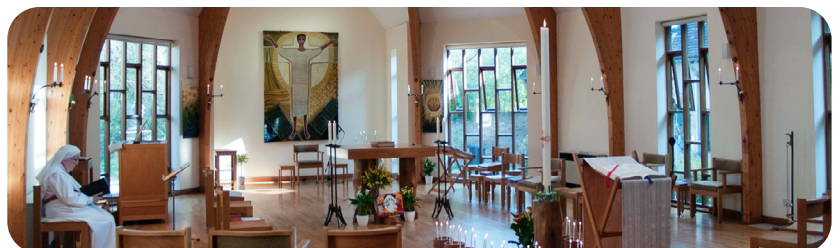
We will not be opening the chapel to the public for the funeral, but are planning to live-stream the service and the Office for the Dead.

Links and further information will be posted on our website:

[http://www.turveyabbey.org.uk/
community/sr-lucy-mary-brydon/](http://www.turveyabbey.org.uk/community/sr-lucy-mary-brydon/)

Thank you

Sr Benedict





Dilatato Corde 1:2
July – December, 2011

Author

JOURNEY INTO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE 1939-2011

Had Allah so willed He would surely have made you one single community.

*Instead (He gave each of you a Law and a way of life)
in order to test you by what He gave you.*

Vie, then, with one another in good works.

*Unto Allah is the return of all of you;
and He will then make you understand the truth
concerning the matters on which you disagreed.*

(Holy Qur'an 5:48)

If God is infinite, nothing can be separate.

(Sir John Marks Templeton)



Sister **Lucy Brydon** spent the early years of her religious life as a Sister of Mercy in teaching and administrative posts in the north of England and Kenya. In 1988 she joined the Olivetan Benedictine Sisters of Turvey Abbey. Besides representing the Turvey nuns' community in interreligious matters (she is currently coordinator of the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue commission for Great Britain and Ireland) she is Guest Sister, in retreat and hospitality work, offers spiritual direction and is one of the cantors. Her retreat and spiritual direction work is interreligious in its outreach.

When I look back over my life I realise that I belonged to a "minority religion". I was part of a fervent Roman Catholic family in a largely Protestant neighbourhood where ecumenism had hardly been heard of. My childhood was an experience of learning good neighbourliness and friendship with people of "other religions", Anglicans, Methodists, and Baptists. It was an excellent preparation for the REAL interfaith dialogue that would take place in later years. Even though in those days we were not allowed to enter another church building, much less take part in "the services or prayers of a false religion" (Penny Catechism), yet we did relate to each other, play with each other, help each other out, and pray for each other—at least, we Catholics prayed for those not of the True Faith! We went to separate schools and churches, but somehow this did not matter so much when playing cowboys and Indians; or keeping house. I don't remember fighting about religion, or even discussing it, but when we engaged in playful snow fights, it was "Cathy Cats" versus "Proddy Dogs"—all fairly good-natured.

Later, while still young, I remember being shocked to learn that some Christians actually blamed Jews for the death of Jesus. From my earliest days I had known that Jesus was a Jew and that we (sinners) were the ones who caused his suffering and death through our unfaithfulness to Him. My parents, though uneducated, must have had a very open and expansive understanding of who Jesus was for us.

After my primary school years, where I did have contacts at home with other Christians, I then attended a Roman Catholic direct grant Grammar School run by sisters. It had a boarding house for people like me who came from remote areas. From this time onwards, I had little contact with people of other Christian denominations, and none at all with people of other religions. After school I joined the religious community which had educated me, went to university as a young sister, and taught for many years in the same Roman Catholic school during its transformation (?) from direct grant Grammar School to Comprehensive School. There were some ecumenical contacts with other staff members and some parents, but I do not remember ever meeting anyone of another religion.

During the latter part of this time, Vatican II burst upon us and it was thrilling to learn about ecumenism, to say nothing of the mind-boggling idea that we could relate to people of what had been called "pagan" religions because God and Truth could be found in them, too. It was an exhilarating time, as we younger sisters devoured everything printed that came from Rome, especially the non-official accounts of what went on in the Council.

But though Vatican II changed many aspects of my life, it was not until I went to Kenya at the end of the 1970s that I came into personal contact with people of another religion. I had opted for Comparative Religion for a Cambridge Religious Studies Diploma towards the end of the 1970s and did a course on Islam. This was my first experience of a truly expansive vision of God's way with humankind. Although it was all theoretical, I think the borders of my mind were becoming more flexible. As I look back now, I see that even before I actually had personal contact with real, live Muslims, God was moving me in the direction He wanted me to go.

When I arrived in Kenya and became immersed in teaching in a secondary school, it was as though my journey into interfaith dialogue really began. All that had gone before was something like preparing for a journey: packing, discarding things, deciding what to take, etc. I found that the school, although founded for Catholic Kenyan girls (mainly Maasai), had a significant number of local Muslim girls on the roll. There was a large Muslim community in our small township, and as we sisters were going in to our early morning prayers, we could hear the Muslim call to prayer ringing across the little valley between us. I had learned about this call to prayer in the Cambridge Diploma course, and we had a few jokes about "Prayer is better than sleep" at 6.30 in the morning. But it was another opening of the heart: the realisation that we were praising God in this place, and across the valley, Muslim men were also engaged in the same activity to the same God. As I got to know the families of our students, I sometimes would tell the parents how I was united with them in spirit every morning and evening when we heard their call to prayer. They were invariably pleased. For me it was another lifting of the heart. The Muslim community shared their feasts with us by bringing us cakes and sweetmeats on all their major festivals and inviting us to their family weddings. It was delightful and colourful "Dialogue of Life" experience.

There were many ways in which our friendship with the Muslims of our township was a real means of enlarging my heart in gratitude to God and openness to other faith practices. When Ramadan arrived, I found myself “conspiring” with the Sheikh of the little mosque, so that the older students would not collapse during their exams. We agreed together that during their exams the girls would be excused the full rigour of the fast. It was very hard to convince them to obey the Sheikh. I found myself again deeply moved and impressed by their faith and loyalty to their religious practices.

One incident above all continues to stand out for me as an experience of grace. One day, while visiting a Muslim family to speak to the parents of one of our students, I found myself alone in a room with the old grandmother as I waited for the mother of the girl to arrive. The old lady did not attempt to speak to me or welcome me. I do not think she was aware of my presence at all. She was completely immersed in an intense state of prayer, with the Holy Qur’an open on her knee. I will never forget the serene, recollected expression on her face. I had an awed feeling that I should take off my shoes, for I was standing on holy ground. The intensity of her contemplation made that small room into a mosque or, for me, an oratory. I prayed silently too, and I felt we were somehow united. This experience of graced insight was broken by the bustling arrival of the mother, and we went on to talk school business, the old lady remaining wrapped in silent prayer. It was a small event which had then, and still has, an eternal significance for me.

My contact with Hindus in Kenya was less profound, but it taught me a different lesson. I dealt with them mainly as a customer in their place of business in Nairobi, but their warm and open-hearted welcome each time I appeared had to do with the fact that we were both people of faith and prayer—as well as the fact that I was a good customer. One manager in particular always wanted to talk about his faith and prayer (even while queues of customers were mounting up!) and we always took leave of each other with “God bless you”. This was something I had not expected from people of another colour, culture and faith, and it warmed my heart. They always invited us sisters to visit them, and had we lived nearer, we would have been welcomed into their homes and their lives.

By the time I left Kenya in 1988, perhaps the most precious thing that I was sorry to leave behind, (apart from the beauty of Kenya) was the contact with people of another religion, which had made me appreciate my own faith and begin to have a new insight into the nature of the “God of a thousand Names” and a desire to go further along this path of knowledge. I did not think it would be possible for this to happen, because I was moving into the relatively “enclosed” life of a monastery of Benedictine women. God knew better, and the time in Kenya somehow led naturally to a further stage of the journey into interfaith dialogue.

I found that I had joined a community which took Ecumenism in its widest form very seriously as part of its own special charism. Dom Constantine Bosschaerts, a Belgian monk who established the Vita et Pax Foundation, from which Turvey Abbey eventually came, wanted people of every denomination or faith (or none) to feel at home in the monasteries of his foundation. I found this a thrilling ideal. I soon discovered that Turvey had a living and active ministry to people of every Christian denomination, many of whom describe it as their “second home.” Working in the retreat and guest departments, I was part of this ministry. Then one of those ‘Damascus Road’ events happened for me.



In 1993 the nearby Theravadan Buddhist monastery of Amaravati was organising a large conference called “Faith in Awakening”. Turvey was sending two sisters and two brothers to represent our communities, and to my delight, I was one of them. When we arrived I found to my amazement that there were people from more than thirty different groups; they represented every mainline denomination, the main world religions, and several “fringe” groups. The monk organising it told us later that he had sent information and invitations to several hundred people, expecting about a quarter to reply. All of them accepted the invitation, and the large turn-out must have made for a logistical nightmare! One of our brothers had already established good contacts with the Buddhists, but it was my first personal experience of meeting Buddhist monks and nuns. The conference offered a variety of experiences: discussion groups, teaching sessions by leaders of the various faith groups, silent periods, informal chats, and meals together in a vast marquee. Each night all the residential members assembled for a meditation session.

Though the discussion groups and informal contacts were helpful and friendly, and had possibilities (I was already thinking: “Christian-Buddhist Retreats”), I found that often there was a mismatch of understanding. We were using the same words at times to mean very different things. To give just one very obvious example: suffering. There was

also, of course, the troublesome word “God,” which evoked enormous differences of understanding, attitude and response even among the Christians present. I found myself challenged by the talks and discussions, with much to ponder, and some important insights that continued to open my heart (the meaning of suffering and the causes and ‘solution’ as seen by Buddhists; God as the Unborn, the Undying, the Unconditioned, the only REAL). Thinking back to this conference, I recognise that Buddhism (through the monks and nuns I met and through the realisation that we share so much in the monastic dimension of our lives) had a much more powerful influence on me than any of the other religions or groups.

But it was when we came to the morning and evening meditation and “devotions” sessions that I experienced a genuine expansion of the heart, soul, mind that continues to this day. Each religious group took turns in offering a “devotion”; for us it was the singing of Compline one evening, with a simple guitar accompaniment. To my amazement, everyone joined in when it was our turn; and the atmosphere was intensely prayerful and respectful. I had expected some people to opt out. Certain devotional practices of other groups were outside our ability to join in, being conducted in other languages (e.g. Pali). In those cases, we listened respectfully to each other and (in my case) silently praised God for the variety of His people.

After the devotional practice, which was emotionally very moving, we moved into silence together. In the morning the group was larger because it involved the day-time participants. The evening session was for the residents, and we were a large group, making for a tight fit when we met in the meditation hall. We simply sat in silence. It was not my first experience of meditation. I had personally “discovered” meditation or centring prayer in my early years as a sister and had been practising it for years. But that was largely an individual experience. This was something else. We may all have been “doing” something different beneath the surface of the silence, but it felt that here we were totally one body. There was a live, “electric” quality to the intense silence of this vast group. The only thing I could compare it to, from my own experience, was sitting in silence together, after praising God in tongues, at a large charismatic conference gathering. It seemed to me that the presence and the power of God’s Spirit were alive and active in that interfaith group in an unmistakeable way.

On the first night and also on another evening something rather disconcerting happened. A youngish man, obviously familiar with Christian charismatic prayer groups, “prophesied” in the accepted charismatic way, speaking in the name of God (“My people. I am here with you. . . .”) It struck me as out of place and rather embarrassing in such a gathering where many people would not be “believers” in the God worshipped by Christians and addressed in charismatic prayer groups. Then the most beautiful thing happened. The totally intense silence continued, and even deepened. No one attempted to speak to the young man, but there was absolutely no sense of rejection or disagreement either. I had a deep realisation of his being “held” in the love and compassion of the group. He only spoke once on each occasion. I do not know what other people thought of it. It seemed to me that the powerful love and compassion of the group was truly an experience of the nature of God-with-us. It is nearly twenty years ago and still a living memory.

Following this experience of “Faith in Awakening” the path to interfaith dialogue opened out still further for me. We began to offer Christian-Buddhist retreats on “meditation and mindfulness” with Buddhist nuns and/or monks teaching with me in the setting of our monastery (Turvey Abbey). I was also invited to give two Buddhist-Christian retreats at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery. These occasions have all been means of enlarging my heart, my mind, my experience of God. Growing and deepening friendships with the Buddhist nuns who taught me with me have also contributed. We are all on the path to enlightenment. It surely cannot be an accident or coincidence that the words used in John’s Gospel to describe who Christ is, are also the words in which Buddhists speak of their own journey to Enlightenment: Way, Truth, Light, Life.

One way in which this growing experience of interfaith dialogue has touched me is the realisation that it is a way of allowing many people who have left the Christian churches because of bad experiences there or in their homes to experience the love of God. We meet in that active silence and compassion. My first experience of co-leading a retreat in a Buddhist monastery in the early 1990s showed this to me very clearly. Of the fifty participants, only one was a born Buddhist. Most of the others were former Christians of different denominations. Some addressed quite hostile questions and pain-filled comments to me in the question and answer periods, especially about the Roman Catholic Church. Since there was no priest present on Sunday, I announced that to commemorate the Lord’s Day, I would be holding a small “Agapé” service, explaining what it meant. We would remember Jesus and his death and resurrection, using bread and wine in an informal way. I emphasised that I was not a priest, and this was not the Mass or the formal Eucharist, but rather a simple thanksgiving (eucharist) for Jesus. I prepared an ordinary slice of bread, a glass of wine, and a glass of grape juice for Buddhists. I thought a few Buddhists and Christians might join me. Forty-eight retreatants came, in addition to several members of the Buddhist community. We all sat together, with a low table in the middle. From my place, I commented in simple words on the symbolism of bread and wine (many grains, ground fine into one bread; many grapes crushed into one wine; the comparison with our own lives—joys and sorrows making one life). I read the account in 1 Corinthians (using a New Testament offered by one of the Buddhist nuns). We passed the plate of bread and then the cups of wine and grape juice from person to person, waiting respectfully as each one reflected silently on the meaning of the bread and wine in his or her own life. I then suggested that if anyone wanted to, they could go and break off a piece of bread and eat it as a thanksgiving, or offer it for someone they loved, and do the same with the wine or juice. While this was happening (almost everyone took part) we played a Taizé chant (*Nada te turbe*, “Let nothing disturb you,” the prayer of Saint Teresa of Avila). The silence was intense and completely reverent, only broken by the small sounds of some people weeping quietly. We ended in silence, and people got up to leave as and when they were ready.

Afterwards one participant who was a practising Roman Catholic came to me and commented: “That is what the Eucharist is meant to be like”. Another said how moving it was to offer the bread and wine to the next person, and for them to receive it. One or two others said it had brought them a sense of healing and they felt they might perhaps go back to their parish church. I do not know of any long-term effects of it —except on myself. It was one of the most moving and Christocentric experiences of my life.

The enlarging of the heart for me has been mainly through Buddhism, although it began through meeting Muslims. I now look forward to growing in this area, as God allows me to encounter people of other faiths at a deeper level, and to meet Him in their experiences of listening to His Word spoken in their lives. For “the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must (all) give account” (Hebrews 4:11-14, NKJV).

Interfaith Visit to Iran in 2012

Two things are particularly noteworthy for me. One was the 2012 visit to Iran. I have to admit that I went with some misgivings, particularly once I began to make my travel arrangements and found that top of the BFCO list of places NOT to visit was Iran. The difficulties and frustrations of managing to get a visa (from Ireland) was also another very off-putting experience. But these things faded into insignificance once we arrived in Tehran and journeyed to Qum where the conference took place.



Shrine of the Lady Fatimah in Qum

We arrived in the early dawn to the warmest welcome I had ever experienced up to that point! Nothing was too difficult for our hosts who had arranged everything for us. The actual conference in the Institute for Islamic Studies, Qum, was both fascinating and memorable in the forms of dialogue we were able to experience. But for me the best part was the contacts beyond and around the actual conference. And most of these seemed to concern women meeting women (though there were plenty of men around too, of course.)

It was a tremendous joy to renew friendship and visual contact with Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali and his wife Mahnaz Heydarpour. We had met in 2003, and then again in London when we in UK hosted the international Monastic Interreligious Dialogue commissions. Representative monks/nuns from several countries were present. Now to meet on THEIR home ground was a delight. We only had a week but it was filled with fascinating visits and tours outside the conference times.

One visit was to the impressive women's University of Jami'at Al Zahra, where both Dr Shomali and his wife teach. Meeting the women students and staff was a most joyful experience.

Another day I had the personal privilege of speaking to a class of about 35 young women learning English at Al Mustafa University. Their questions to me were open and honest, as were mine to them, and a very real dialogue took place, though in rather a formal setting. We asked and answered REAL questions about each other's life and faith. It was obvious and very moving that we understood each other.

I was asked for instance, to talk about my "vocation" to the monastic life. The teacher Dr Isa Jahangir said it was not a familiar concept in Islam. But when we got into the idea of "listening" to God, it was clear that we understood each other. Listening like this with the heart not the ears...



Al Mustafa University, with Dr Isa Jahangir, a Turkish Muslim teacher living in Qum.

Several times during that all-too-brief week, I was completely taken aback and won over by the genuineness, openness and humility of questions put to me: "Please give me a word ...". At first I did not understand what was being asked of me. So Mahnaz explained: "A word to help her/them to love God more". This happened in the meetings at the university classes, and even on a 'tourist' visit to Esfahan from complete strangers, women passing in the street. (I could not help reflecting that in a comparable situation in UK I might have been asked: "Why do you wear those funny clothes?"). This sense of an immediate 'connection' happened even with women working in the airport at Tehran.

Most of my experiences of dialogue with Muslims have begun in an "official" way (at conferences for example) but have led to personal, ongoing and sometimes rather special kinds of dialogue.

Since 2003 I have been in friendly communication with Dr Mohammad Shomali and Mahnaz Heydarpour, and though everyone is very busy we manage to keep abreast of what is going on for each other, and I think, learn from each other. On rare occasions when they are in England we even manage to meet and have a little time together. These are very precious times.

At the 2010 European Conference of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue Commissions, the main speakers were Dr Reza Shah Kazemi and Dr Shomali. A significant part of the day was a talk and then discussion around Qur'an Surah 5:48, and the idea of interfaith dialogue as "provoking each other to holiness". Attending the meeting were some other Muslim men and women. Among them a western woman convert, who expressed a wish to continue with dialogue in some way and indeed we have become friends (D:G - "Thanks be to God").