



Interfaith Seminary

Training Ministers and
Spiritual Counsellors



PROSPECTUS

“A unique and innovative training, on which I felt challenged, inspired and nourished. Its contribution to the world of interfaith and the creation of a new spiritual ministry for the 21st century cannot be over-estimated. I enjoyed every moment of the programme and thoroughly recommend it.”

Lynne Sedgmore CBE, Chief Executive of the 157 Group and advisor to Whitehall on a range of projects including leadership, innovation capability, community cohesion and preventing violent extremism. She is also a consultant and coach in private organisations. Former Chief Executive, Centre for Excellence in Leadership, the leadership college for the UK's further education sector.

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How to contact the Interfaith Seminary

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By post: See website for postal address

By website: www.interfaithfoundation.org

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Interfaith Seminary Faculty

Rev Nicola Coombe (Seminary leader)

Rev Christopher Marcus

Rev Elaine Walker

Rev Kathryn Wallace

Rev Jackie Amos Wilkinson

The Interfaith Foundation

The Interfaith Foundation is our company and charity name, within which there are two areas of activity: the Interfaith Seminary which trains ministers; and the Interfaith Ministers Association, supporting the community of our ordained ministers.

Management and administration

Rev Nicola Coombe

Seminary Leader

Rev Lindsay Jarrett

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Community Facilitator

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Trustees

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Rev Kate Atchley

Rev Marilyn Joy Campbell

Rev Avril Carson

Rev Catherine Field (Treasurer)

Rev Rob MacLachlan (Chair)

Rev Philip Maultby

Elders

Rev Diane Berke (Director of our sister school One Spirit Interfaith Seminary, New York)

Rev Peter Dewey

Dr Robert Holden

Rev Miranda Macpherson (Founder of the UK Interfaith Seminary)

Rev Lynne Sedgmore, OBE

Legal information

The Interfaith Foundation is a charitable company limited by guarantee.

Registered Charity No: 1099163.

Registered Company No: 4432622 (England and Wales) SCO40148 (Scotland).

Registered Office: 1 Brook House, Brook Street, Wivenhoe, Colchester, Essex CO7 9DP (please do not send mail to this address, see website for postal address)

“How do we truly open to our Godself and learn to trust the Love that we are? It is impossible to awaken alone. Because we are all One, we can only do it together. The Interfaith Seminary, sounding a note both magnetic and radical, can provide a wonderful way of discovering that.”

Annie Blampied, teacher of A Course in Miracles.

Interfaith minister and spiritual counsellor. Facilitator of the Forgiveness Network. Former educational adviser in the Steiner/Waldorf schools world wide.

Introduction

The Interfaith Seminary trains open-hearted men and women in an inclusive global spirituality, to serve people from all faiths or none.

We welcome everyone who feels called to deepen their understanding and awareness of true Self and Spirit. We are committed to sharing our journey of exploration into what it means to be human, and how to serve Life, God, the Source of All, in myriad ways, both secular and sacred.

Our ministers create and lead ceremonies, offer spiritual counselling, and work in roles both 'secular' and overtly 'spiritual' with individuals, families and communities throughout the UK and globally. Each seeks to live their individual calling in a direct and authentic way.

Believing there is One God, One Truth, and that many paths lead to the Source of All, the Interfaith Seminary is inclusive, embracing the universal truth at the heart of all spiritual traditions. We celebrate the values of respect, reconciliation, forgiveness and fellowship. We honour and support peace-making and the awareness of our unity in Spirit.

We warmly invite you to consider whether this training might be part of your own path into an ever-deepening experience of love, awakening and service.

“My time on the training programme has been very rich and joyful. If you feel called to dive deep into your Self, to explore your authentic being and to find your path of personal spiritual service, then I can’t recommend the Interfaith Seminary’s training highly enough.”

Peter Lloyd, editor and publisher, HolisticHongKong.com

Our Seminary so far

The Interfaith Seminary's line of descent goes back to 1981 when The New Seminary was founded in New York by Rabbi Joseph Gelberman, with the support of religious leaders such as Swami Satchidananda, Methodist minister Rev Jon Mundy and others wishing to explore beyond the boundaries of their own faith.

In 1996 Miranda Holden started The New Seminary in London, having travelled to be trained and ordained in New York. She adapted the US training programme to the particular culture and needs of the UK.

As this organisation's leader for its first 10 years, Miranda presided over a steady growth in student numbers; recruited a talented team of faculty and visiting speakers; and led the development of new teaching methods and materials. Our name changed to The Interfaith Seminary in 2002, and we became a registered charity in 2004. Our name was further changed to the Interfaith Foundation in 2009, encompassing the existing Interfaith Seminary training arm.

Miranda's stepped out of the Seminary's leadership in 2006. Now known as Miranda Macpherson she teaches and leads spiritual retreats around the world.

More than 400 interfaith ministers have been ordained in the UK, drawn from diverse backgrounds. Some have travelled long distances to train, and are now ministers in their own countries – including Ireland, France, Holland, Italy, Australia, Germany, Spain, USA and Hong Kong.

We have a close relationship of reciprocal support with the One Spirit Interfaith Seminary and Learning Alliance in New York, which also emerged from The New Seminary. The senior faculty of One Spirit Interfaith Seminary, usually attend and contributes to our annual retreat and Ordination ceremony, and we are represented at the equivalent events in New York.

After Miranda's departure, the Seminary's trustees, teaching faculty, and community of ministers and students engaged in a process of deep reflection

and renewal, from which has emerged a clear and passionate sense of how Spirit is unfolding in this stage of our evolution as an organisation. Included in this was the change to the organisation's overarching name, the Interfaith Foundation, and establishing our new Interfaith Ministers Association. Seeking to express an identity – including our organisation's name – that authentically reflects our work and is contemporary is a current inquiry.

Training ministers is the Interfaith Seminary's core purpose, and it is only natural that a programme designed to facilitate the unfolding of spiritual consciousness should itself continually evolve. One way in which this is happening is in the deepening sense that everyone in our Interfaith Seminary and Foundation community – including our students – is co-creating our future. In doing so, we are modelling a different way of being in relationship, and being in the world.

“I have done many years of personal development courses, and nothing has compared with the Interfaith Seminary. I found new vistas of awareness into myself and others; wise and nurturing tutors and mentors; deep loving companionship among my fellow students; a rich and challenging spiritual experience; an affirmation of how best to be with others in need; a wide learning about other faiths and a deepening of my own. This course changed my life like no other – bringing me home, from where I set out safely on my true path of service and ministry.”

Prof Stephen G Wright, Faculty of Health & Social Care, University of Cumbria. Founding Editor of Spirituality and Health International and Chairman of The Sacred Space Foundation.

Our interfaith/ interspiritual vision

We acknowledge the turbulent history and current reality of deep conflicts within the human family, many in the name of different religions. For millennia, precious teachings about love and unity that lie at the heart of every religion have been overshadowed by those who preach intolerance and distrust of the other.

We believe that differences, when approached as a potential source of enrichment, need not be experienced as a threat. We honour the timeless understanding that, essentially, there is One God and One Truth. Old dichotomies of 'us' versus 'them' do not serve the healing of our world. Thus our focus is on removing, within ourselves, the obstacles to unity.

We whole-heartedly support the many interfaith initiatives that encourage dialogue and understanding between religions. And we look for even deeper dimensions of unity, where we can recognise every human being as a facet of the One Spirit, a reflection of something in ourselves. We see the interfaith/ interspiritual concept as a powerful invitation not just to tolerance, but acceptance; not only to dialogue, but brother/sisterhood.

This Seminary trains open-hearted, spiritually inspired men and women to understand and appreciate the astounding diversity within the human family, yet to focus on our common experience and be a powerful presence of peace in whatever field of service they choose.

“My vow, on being ordained as an Interfaith Seminary minister, was ‘to be the presence of love and to radiate joy to everyone I meet. I vow to accept myself fully, to know my wholeness and to see the wholeness in others.’ Little by little this vow is becoming my reality. What more could I ask?”

Jan Yeo, housewife and mother

The many faces of ministry

As interfaith ministers, we aim to be of service to people of all faiths or none. Our help is sought most often by:

- Those seeking spiritual connection and expression, and including those who may feel uncomfortable with conventional religion (shown by surveys to be the majority of the UK population).
- People from different religious backgrounds who wish to honour more than one faith tradition (in a marriage or child blessing ceremony, for instance).
- Those struggling with issues they find difficult to raise within their faith, culture or family (for example, questioning of sexuality).

We are not creating a new religion, but filling a growing spiritual gap in modern society. It's not our aim to convert anyone away from their faith, but to support people who wish to enquire deeply into their own spiritual tradition and their own inner development.

A great many of our graduates are involved in conducting weddings, funerals and blessing ceremonies. Some have started their own centres, worship communities and spiritual education programmes. Others tend more towards offering spiritual counselling – privately, or in hospitals, hospices, colleges and schools.

Some have taken their calling – whether expressed in explicitly 'spiritual' terms or not – into business training, into peace-making projects, and into the whole passage of family and community life, including parenting. Many have brought increased inspiration to their work as artists, writers and musicians.

And for some, the result of the training has simply been a more authentic expression of who they are, and a deeper sharing of their spirituality with others in their everyday lives. In the Interfaith Seminary, we hold that the qualities we bring to our service are more important than its form of expression.

Curriculum overview

The Interfaith Seminary honours both the head and the heart as holy ground. We offer a balance between process and study, emphasising the importance of experiential as well as intellectual learning.

The underlying purpose of the curriculum is to facilitate each participant's awakening to unity – within ourselves, with all of humanity and all of Life. The Seminary aims to support each student in their own awakening process, so that in time they may support others to do the same.

This process of inquiry takes place on many levels, including:

- each person's psycho-spiritual journey within
- the one-to-one relating between students, mentors and faculty
- within local smaller study groups of about 5–6 students
- within the whole class group and the groups in other centres
- in our relationship to all that is beyond the Seminary.

There are four interweaving strands in our training:

1. **Personal awakening.** We believe that a minister's effectiveness rests upon his or her own clarity, integration and intention. As students move into a more direct personal experience of the Source of All, their capacity for love, compassion and kindness grows. They are then better able to leave personal prejudices and past negative patterns behind, and to bring their essential Self and natural talents fully into being as the platform for their ministry.

2. **Opening to other traditions.** This is a dynamic, lived inquiry into the world's major faith traditions, which seeks to challenge radically our received judgments and to widen our capacity for heartfelt inclusion. While gaining respect, insight and appreciation for traditions different from their own tradition - whether inherited or practised - students often develop a deeper appreciation of their own tradition, and heal the wounds in their relationship with that too.

3. **Spiritual counselling.** An essential training strand, this involves developing basic skills and confidence in a simple but powerful form of spiritual counselling. This enables ministers to support individuals seeking their help at a time of difficulty or for direction and support in spiritual direction and reflection, and to be able to recognise when someone needs to be referred on for more specialist help.

4. **Leading ceremonies.** Participants practise leading universal worship services, and giving inspirational talks. The training also equips them to conduct weddings, funerals, blessings and other life-transition ceremonies. We do not teach standard 'scripts', but develop the ability of participants to create tailor-made services that reflect the unique needs and wishes of those they provide the ceremonies for and with.

How the training unfolds

In **the first year** we work primarily with the process of personal awakening, and the experiential inquiry into faith traditions. Alongside this, our spiritual counselling approach is introduced, including peer counselling, as is some exploration of ceremony and a self directed learning practice. This first year is, in itself, a complete and certificated course that stands on its own merit, making the movement into the second year a choice rather than an assumption.

In **the second year** the transition to a life of service becomes more explicit, with a deeper focus on learning the art of spiritual counselling, and the capacity to design and hold ceremonies. In parallel, we keep our attention on how this relates to systems of thought and faith that are inclusive, holistic and universal.

We develop these skills partly by revisiting our own life's journey with fresh awareness, looking closely into the transitions of birth, childhood and adolescence, partnership and marriage, death and loss, and healing. In healing our understanding of our own lives we develop the capacity to be present to others in ways that are inspired by grace, compassion, humour and trust.

In both years of the training students receive regular spiritual counselling/ direction from their mentors who are themselves in supervision.

Whether or not, after ordination, graduates use the skills of spiritual counselling and creating ceremonies explicitly , these powerful tools provide an inner matrix and channel for disciplined development of the capacity to listen deeply for the voice of the Sacred – and to choose to create consciously, in whatever field of life this is expressed.

The second year experience is further deepened with an invitation to offer service by undertaking a further self-directed learning experience or creative project; with regular peer counselling; and with the creation of an integrated summation of the work of the two years in the form of a minister's manual.

In order to meet each student's unique journey we intend that the curriculum should provide a framework that is clear in its delivery, free in its creativity, and accountable to the needs of the world. That we also take this path within a passionate constellation of fellow travellers is part of an underlying commitment to co-creation and the rise of group consciousness.

In the course of the second year our students deepen their questioning of whether to seek ordination upon fulfilment of the course requirements. The second year is certificated in its own merit, and the ordination is in addition to this achievement.

Teachers and mentors

Our faculty are a group of talented people from varied spiritual backgrounds, with substantial experience in education, psychology, community building and the healing arts. Most are themselves graduates of the Seminary's training and active interfaith ministers.

Each training programme will have a **core tutor, typically working in parallel with a second tutor**, who will be with the class throughout the two-year programme, from induction to completion. The process will be assisted by:

A panel of **visiting tutors**, who have particular experience in teaching specialist parts of the curriculum. Details of tutors are available on the Foundation's website.

A team of **mentors** who will be dedicated to supporting your training programme for the two years. Students on each programme will be divided into study groups with a small group of participants, and one mentor will work closely with each small group. Mentors are all graduate interfaith ministers, selected for their capacity for inspired service and their subtle skills, and will be working with you as part of their own postgraduate training in spiritual direction and group facilitation skills.

Visiting speakers

In addition to the Interfaith Seminary's core and visiting tutors we are privileged to have contributions from visiting speakers representing the world's religious and spiritual traditions. These speakers provide an insight into their faith background and practices, and enter into deep and open dialogue about aspects that particularly interest or trouble students.

It is of course difficult to cover all the world's faith traditions in the training; our emphasis will be less on breadth, and more on depth – focusing on key faith traditions, or groupings of traditions, and exploring these with

approaches that, once learned, students can then apply elsewhere.

A list of visiting speakers who have enriched our training programmes in recent years are available to view on our website: www.interfaithfoundation.org. Many of them will continue to be involved in the coming years.

Training options

Our new training programmes start in the autumn each year; for further details of training options please visit our website: www.interfaithfoundation.org.

Admission requirements

The Interfaith Seminary welcomes men and women of any or no specific faith background. We do not favour or exclude anybody on the basis of age, gender or sexual orientation, or ethnic, religious or cultural background, disability, or academic or occupational achievements.

Emphasis is placed on an applicant's sincerity, maturity, intention and spiritual readiness. We also need to make clear that this training is not appropriate for people at the very beginning of their spiritual inquiry. Those who are in the early phase of a major transition such as divorce or the loss of a loved one need to declare this information so that we can dialogue with you about the best timing for you to begin the programme. Each person is unique in this way and we approach you as an individual.

The process has been designed for adults who are:

- Actively committed to their own spiritual awakening process
- Emotionally grounded – willing to handle group interactions and feedback
- Typically engaged in the world of work, including parenting and social care
- Intrigued by other traditions and inspired by universal ideals
- Feeling called to give loving service to others
- Genuinely open to new insights and experiences.

The application process

1 If you wish to apply and believe you fit the above description, please fill in the application form sent to you with this booklet. If you do not have an application form, please download it from our website or contact our administrator at admin@interfaithfoundation.org, or call 08444 457 004.

2 Send the completed application form to our administrator (details on the form) along with a short letter of recommendation from someone in spiritual or psychological service with whom you have worked or studied, or someone who you believe to be in a suitable position to endorse/support your readiness for this training.

3 You will then be invited to attend an Introductory Day, where you can meet members of the faculty; gain a fuller sense of what the training involves; meet ministers and current students; have your questions answered; and clarify whether the training seems right for you. You are completely welcome to attend an Introductory Day without having first filled out the application form.

4 If the next Introductory Day is some time off, or if you would like to speak to someone more informally first, then we can put you in touch with one of our team of Seminary graduates who would be happy to talk about their experience of the training and of being an interfaith minister. Ask our administrator for more details.

5 After you have attended an Introductory Day, and confirmed that you wish to proceed with your application, we will arrange an informal telephone 'interview' with one of our faculty members.

6 All being well, we will then confirm the offer of a place, and send you two copies of our learning agreement, which sets out our mutual commitments and responsibilities as Seminary and student. When you sign these, and return one copy of the learning agreement with your deposit payment, we will confirm that you are registered for the training.

Legal standing of ministers

Interfaith Seminary ministers come under the legal category of 'non-conformist', and as with all faith communities other than the Church of England, are ordained and certified by our own self-governing community, operating independently of the state.

Marriage ceremonies are the only aspect of ministry in which specific legal aspects apply. In England and Wales, an interfaith minister performs a blessing ceremony with no legal restrictions, and the couple hold the legal element of the marriage at a registry office beforehand.

In Scotland and Northern Ireland, interfaith ministers apply to the Registrar General for authorisation to perform a marriage, making it unnecessary for the couple to attend a separate civil ceremony.

Our graduates adhere to a clear code of ethics (see back cover), and a complaints procedure for members of the public. They are eligible for professional indemnity insurance.

The Interfaith Ministers Association is the spiritual community of ministers and counsellors ordained by the Interfaith Seminary. Those with an active ministry can choose to be on the searchable Public Register of Ministers. The Association is also the professional body supporting ministers by providing facilities to sustain their spiritual vows and professional commitments for supervision, continuous professional development, insurance and conduct.

“The Interfaith Seminary training was a transformational journey. It challenged my thinking, helped me to celebrate both the differences and the connections between the various spiritual paths and deepened my connection to the Divine. This remarkable course synthesised the many aspects of my personal and professional life and enabled me to clarify my purpose here on earth.”

Sue Boyd, nurse, facilitator, former educational director of The Bristol Cancer Help Centre



The Ground of Being

Ethics of the Interfaith Foundation and Seminary

www.interfaithfoundation.org

To promote integrity in our training and our lives our ministers, staff and students intend to:

- Remember our unity and honour our uniqueness
- Walk our talk
- Celebrate honesty
- Protect clarity
- Honour physical boundaries
- Represent ourselves accurately
- Maintain confidentiality
- Value support and ongoing development
- Commit to continued awakening
- Safeguard the whole

“A journey of a lifetime that helps you to follow your true calling and be a presence of love in this world.”

Robert Holden PhD, international author and teacher



Interfaith
Foundation