

# MultiFaithNet: Religion, Live and Interactive

Mrs Eileen Fry

Mrs Eileen Fry  
MultiFaithNet  
Religious Resource and Research  
Centre  
University of Derby  
Mickleover  
Derby DE3 5GX

Tel: 01332 622222 x 2026

Fax: 01332 514323

E Mail: E.Fry@derby.ac.uk

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- The original proposals for MultiFaithNet were developed by the Webmaster, Klaus Stoll, and Dr Paul Weller, Director of the University of Derby's Religious Resource and Research Centre. MultiFaithNet is sponsored by Derby University Enterprises Ltd and is being developed within the Religious Resource and Research Centre of the School of Education and Social Science. MultiFaithNet works with a panel of consultants drawn from the religious traditions which it covers and from academics with expertise in respect of these traditions.

This paper will present an outline of the development of MultiFaithNet from its inception to global launch on 11 March 1998, describing the various services and their inter relationship with the website that is MultiFaithNet. MultiFaithNet evolved out of and builds upon the track record of the Religious Resource and Research Centre which has already produced in conjunction with The Inter Faith Network for the UK, Religions in the UK: A Multi-Faith Directory (1997) which is widely recognised as a unique and comprehensive guide to faith communities, their organisations and places of worship in the UK.

MultiFaithNet is a self-access research and information tool for those with information, community liaison and equal opportunities

responsibilities in the public, private and voluntary sectors, for religious leaders and for staff and students in higher education. It provides regularly updated subscription access to global electronic resources and interactions useful for the study of world religious traditions and communities and for inter-faith dialogue.

As an electronic "gateway" MultiFaithNet also offers "signposts" to help users find their way around. Without "gateways" and "signposts" it is difficult to distinguish between types of material or to be clear about their provenance. As the use of the Internet expands, a dedicated search facility for religion enables subscribers to connect directly to the sections they require, in the knowledge that there is an overall measure of quality maintained by the panel of consultants.

The first level of service will be free and incorporates the MultiFaithNet welcome with overall information on MultiFaithNet's aims, a detailed catalogue of MultiFaithNet's contents, subscription information and home pages which will host organisations from the world religious traditions and of multi-faith and inter-faith initiatives.

Another free service is the Meditation section where it will be possible to offer faith communities and individuals the opportunity to explore common forms of meditation and to encourage those involved to examine their own beliefs and practice. Although no technology will ever be able to replace the communal togetherness of a congregation at worship and prayer the visual and audio aids for prayer, reflection and meditation, such as texts, music, chants and pictures, will have relevance to the experiences widely available through this section.

In the medium term it is planned to develop MultiFaithNet's potential for relevant structured, interactive, site-based and distance teaching and learning consistent with the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy. In the longer term, MultiFaithNet will be an electronic extension of the University's planned Multi-Faith Centre which, in turn, will locate MultiFaithNet in local geography.