

Multifaith hub for the City of London

by [Gavin Drake](#)

Posted: 27 Feb 2015 @ 12:22

RICHARD VERBER, WORLD JEWISH RELIEF



Walking in peace: the Dean of Coventry, the Very Revd John Witcombe, joins other faith leaders in Coexist Foundation's pilgrimage last week

A VISION to create "one of the most significant interfaith centres in the world" in the City of London was unveiled on Wednesday night at the launch of a £20-million fund-raising appeal.

The planned centre, Coexist House, is the idea of Dr David Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge; and is supported by the Inner Temple, the Corporation of the City of London, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Coexist Foundation.

"Coexist House is designed as much for a secular audience as a religious audience and will not promote any one particular faith," the trustees say in a summary of their feasibility study. "It is a civic endeavour which would improve the way people understand religions and beliefs in all their variety. Nevertheless, it will offer a spiritual space, hospitable to all, in the heart of London."

No location has been identified for the centre, which will open in phases. "The initial phase will be a space within a cultural hub or adjoining academic location," the trustees say. "The concept will progress to becoming an anchor tenant in a mixed-use development, possibly as part of the refurbishment of an iconic building. The final phase could be a stand-alone Coexist House.

"We believe Coexist House to be the most exciting and innovative interfaith project in this country and perhaps also in Europe," Professor Ford was expected to say in a speech on Wednesday night. "We want it to be the most influential and impressive interfaith project in the world."

The Coexist Foundation is already operating in what it calls its "soft phase". It runs the Cambridge Coexist Leadership Programme with the support of the Department for Communities and Local Government; and is working with the *Times* Cheltenham Literature Festival and the Greenbelt Festival.

It has also provided funding and leadership support for the Religion Media Centre at Goldsmiths, University of London. "This will be a new facility, modelled on the highly successful Science Media Centre, to be made available to all journalists," Professor Ford said. Last week, the Foundation organised a pilgrimage through London from London Central Mosque, Regent's Park, to the Central Synagogue in Great Portland Street, and then on to Westminster Abbey; before gathering outside Parliament and St Thomas' Hospital.

The event was designed "to affirm a shared commitment to freedom, equality, democracy and respect for life".

"The religion agenda is too often hijacked by extremists who pervert the message of their faith to meet their own political ideals," Professor Ford said. "Coexist and Cambridge are working hard to emphasise the distinctive nature of the different faiths while also celebrating their common ground and their shared imperative for peace."

"Bad things happen when good people don't stand up and be counted," the Dean of Coventry, the Very Revd John Witcombe, said. "The overwhelming majority of faithful people in this country are on the side of the angels and want to live peacefully and safely in our democratic society."

The Team Rector of East Greenwich, the Revd Margaret Cave, said: "It is good and right that in these troubled times people of faith show solidarity with their sisters and brothers as people of love and peace."

The director of programmes for Coexist, Michael Wakelin, said: "There has never been a more important time for something like Coexist House."

New premises. The UK's oldest interfaith organisation, the Council for Christians and Jews, this week moved into new offices at Collaboration House - a multifaith office hub in Charlotte Street, London, established by the Jewish entrepreneur and philanthropist Maurice Ostro.