



National Interfaith Week November 2019

Introduction

National Interfaith Week, this year took place between Saturday 9th and Sunday 17th November, for which the Birmingham Council of Faiths again coordinated the Birmingham programme. The aims of Interfaith Week are to strengthen interfaith relations at all levels; increase awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the UK, in particular celebrating and building on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society; and to increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs.

The event was officially opened by the Lord Mayor, Councillor Mohammed Azim, Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Honorary President, Birmingham Council of Faiths, at the Launch event in the Council House. The agenda for the launch included an outline of Interfaith Week's significance and outline of the Birmingham programme by Dr Peter Rookes, Secretary and 3rd Sector Liaison Officer, Birmingham Council of Faiths. Qurratul Ain Ahmad (Annie) spoke about Faith Focused Environmental Programmes. Councillor John Cotton, Cabinet Member for Diversity, Safety and Equality spoke about Birmingham's rich faith heritage, and Mahmooda Qureshi spoke about Hope not Hate. Finally, Geraldine Parker gave a presentation on donation and transplantation, particularly amongst minority ethnic communities. Abbas Laljixc concluded the event with a Nasheed Recitation

There were 24 events in total, which comprised discussions, celebrations, remembrance service, spiritual reflection, health and environmental seminars, and a fun evening.

Details of those for which we have received reports are as follows:-

- **Celebration for the birthday of Baha'u'llah and the Bab**

The Chaplaincy team welcomed the Birmingham Baha'i Community to host a celebration for the birthday of Baha'u'llah - founder of the Baha'i Faith - and the 200th anniversary of the birth of the



Bab - herald of the Baha'i Faith - in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Faith and Community Centre. Guest speaker, Dr. Semira Manaseki-Holland, explained how the Bab (a title meaning 'The Gate'), born in 1819 in Persia, was the bearer of a message destined to transform the life of humanity. With His call for spiritual and moral reformation and improving the position of women and the lot of the poor, at a time when His country was undergoing widespread moral breakdown, the Bab's message was revolutionary. As well as laying the foundations for a new age, the Bab's mission was to prepare the way for Baha'u'llah, who Baha'is believe is the latest of God's messengers, sent to

usher in the age of peace and justice promised in all the world's major religions. This world peace, however, Baha'u'llah states, can only be achieved if the unity of humankind is firmly established. So the oneness and unity of the human race is one of the fundamental principles of the Baha'i Faith. Baha'is also believe that God has sent Messengers to humanity at intervals throughout the past and there would be more in the future, as God's guidance for humanity is progressive and has no end.

The introductory talk was followed by a programme of prayers, readings and music which created a beautifully tranquil atmosphere and uplifted everyone's spirits. This was followed by a light lunch when the 30+ attendees, including members of the chaplaincy team, volunteers, hospital staff, members of Birmingham Council of Faiths and members of the Birmingham Baha'i community socialised in a spirit of friendship and unity.

- **King Edwards School, Camp Hill**

Interfaith Week was an opportunity for different organisations to communicate and discuss with the students at King Edwards VI Camp Hill School for Boys. Through assemblies the boys were, not only introduced to new organisations, but reminded of the importance of collaboration and working together especially amongst different communities. Camp Hill has a very diverse makeup of staff and students with all 5 of the major religions being represented. Interfaith Week has made Inter Faith Society much more popular.

- **King Edward Grammar School for Boys**

'Food, Faith and the Future of the Planet' This event was the initiative of a group of staff, students and former pupils, coordinated by Paul Moore-Bridger, Head of RE and Philosophy, and was the first time the school had marked National Interfaith Week. It included vegetarian and vegan food from several faiths and tables set up by faith groups of students to illustrate some of the features of the faiths. There was also an inspiring recital of Sikh music on sitar and tabla introduced by a Sikh teacher. Hindu and Muslim students had prepared talks about their faiths and the teachings regarding food and the future of the planet, which were well researched and presented. A Roman Catholic teacher spoke about a Christian approach to the subject and Paul Moore Bridger also spoke about the importance of interfaith respect and understanding in a rapidly changing world. Finally Ruth Tetlow, who had been invited to represent Footsteps: Faiths for a Low Carbon Future, spoke about the many ways in which the food we eat, the way it is transported, packaged and

disposed of, contributes to the serious threat of climate change. It is to be hoped that this is the first of many such events in future years

- **Speed Faithing**

Near Neighbours hosted a Speed Faithing event in partnership with the Birmingham Humanists for the 2nd year. This time the event was hosted at Moseley Exchange where the Birmingham Humanists host their meetings. 39 people attended the event of varying adult ages and came from different faith backgrounds such as Humanist, Christian, Muslim, and Secular.



Speed Faithing is a social and fun engagement activity for guests and involves them in having a 7 minute conversation with another guest before they move on to the next person.

The questions are fun and cohesive so that they include all.

Some of the feedback we received was as follows which you can choose and include from:-

- *Very interesting, please do it again*
- *Thank You. I felt very safe and free to share my beliefs with people. Please do this again*
- *Thank you so much. Very good idea for bringing people together*
- *Thanks. It was lovely meeting and talking to people*
- *Thanks so much. I really enjoyed it*
- *Very Interesting. I've learned something*
- *Thank you for a lovely event. Love food. Love people*
- *Fantastic to be able to converse with a diverse people of all faiths*
- *Very wonderful to meet lovely people x*
- *Really liked the depth of conversation I was able to reach in 5 minutes. And the diversity of people in the room*
- *Super Conversations, This was great*
- *The event worked well to get people talking about faith*
- *Very interesting, well organised*
- *Great again!*

- **Birmingham Scouts**

Some 300 members of the Scout Association, family and friends gathered at the Scout War Memorial in Cannon Hill Park for our annual service of remembrance. The memorial is dedicated to Scouts who gave their lives in two World Wars. November is not the best month for weather so unfortunately the proceedings were cut short due to heavy rain however this did not dampen the spirit of those attending.

- **Israel-Palestine**

Bull St Birmingham Local Quaker Meeting and Central England Area Meeting hosted part two of *Towards a Better Understanding of Israel/Palestine*. Quakers and Jews came together again to share lunch and watch a very special film called *Two Sided Story*. It's the moving documentary of a group of bereaved families both Palestinians and Israelis as they get to know each other and begin to work on healing their grief together.

We were 24 in number – less than the 33 who met last time but enough for us to break into small groups for discussion of the issues. Topics were offered to get us going and care was taken to make sure that all opinions were heard. Following the Quaker way of Worship-sharing we listened carefully to each offering and allowed a pause between each contribution in the final feedback session.

People found this a more comfortable session than the first one in May, which was somewhat confrontational as it aimed to look at the two sides of the Israel/Palestine conflict. There is a definite feeling now that Jews and Quakers should meet together in the future to continue to get to know each other better and to consider issues relevant to what we can work towards here in Birmingham to develop good relationships. We are now looking at what we can do to further this aim.

- **Tread Lightly: held by BCF Footsteps: Faiths for a low Carbon Future**

Over 40 people from Birmingham's diverse faith communities gathered at the Shree Ram Mandir, Sparkbrook for the fourth annual Tread Lightly event. The programme was initiated and organised by Footsteps, a project of Birmingham Council of Faiths. It included talks by Hitesh Kukadia, a leader of the temple about the Hindu faith, and by Cllr Waseem Zaffar, Cabinet Member for the Environment and Transport.



Cllr Waseem Zaffar addressing
Tread Lightly event

There was a community environment fair and discussions about what changes people would like to see locally to combat the causes and effects of climate change.

The event was a response by faith communities to the declaration of a Climate Emergency by the City Council in June 2019 and the appointment of a Faith Representative to the Task Force set up by the Council to plan for a zero carbon future, and care for the planet.

Cllr Zaffar said that the city's Climate Emergency declaration was partly a result of pressure from faith communities, all of whom were united in concern for the future of the planet. He was particularly concerned about the dangerously high levels of pollution in the city and the need to switch to more walking, cycling and public transport instead of car journeys.

This event gave participants the chance to discuss the issues, to put their views and ideas to the Task Force, and to network with local organisations with similar concerns. There were also speakers from St Johns Church Sparkbrook, Clifton Rd Mosque, Brum Breathes project and SEWA UK. Suggestions from participants included cutting meat in school dinners, more community growing spaces, better routes for bikes and wheelchairs, and cheaper, more efficient public transport. Our 'green dreams' and messages to the City Council were collected on an adhesive 'purple wall'.

The Hindu community generously provided participants with a free hot meal at the end of the afternoon.



- **Christian Science**

It was with great joy that we opened the doors of our church to visitors of different ages and faiths curious to get to know a little more about Christian Science during this year's Interfaith week. This was the plan that our members had decided upon: both to welcome anyone to the Sunday morning service beginning at 10.30am and also to keep the church open until 3.30pm.

It was with joy too, that we ensured that we had plenty of information available on hand in the form of brochures, books, CDs and on-line programmes. Our denominational textbook, "Science and Health with key to the Scriptures", by Mary Baker Eddy was available as a gift to all visitors. We also had a video presentation continuously running about the life of Mary Baker Eddy and how she discovered Christian Science. This was enjoyed by those who watched it and answered some

questions that were asked about our religion. Tasty snacks and beverages were also provided for the hungry and thirsty.

We were most grateful for this opportunity to draw people's attention to the whereabouts of our church in the city of Birmingham and similarly grateful that some of our members were able to attend other Interfaith activities during this week, which they found illuminating and valuable. Interfaith Week plays a vital role in the city and community of Birmingham and we, at 2nd Church of Christ Scientist, are in full support of this enriching event. Our thanks go to all the organisers and helpers.

- **Erdington Interfaith Celebration**

The aim of our event was to bring the different faith within Erdington together and celebrate the diversity in the area. We had music, food, small displays from different faiths and people who run activities to bring people together, e.g. Litter Busters. Approximately 80-100 people of all ages, 5-80 years, attended.



Music at Erdington event

We had a lovely mix of people coming from all faith backgrounds - Buddhists, Christians, Muslims. We tried getting the Jewish community to join us. Unfortunately, due to Sabbath, they were not able to join us, but they did give us some leaflets on the Jewish faith to put on the tables.

This was the first time we organised an event in Erdington to be part of Interfaith week. We found it to be a huge success. The members of the team who helped organise this were inspired to organise more events to bring the communities together. We even had the local MP Jack Dromey pay us a visit, who was well impressed with what we had achieved.

- **Faith and Reflection at Clifton Road Mosque**

The Faith and Reflection evening at the Clifton Road mosque in conjunction with the Birmingham Council of Faiths. People of all faiths attended and discussed a selection of verses from the Holy Quran about thanking and remembering God.



Participants in Faith and Reflection at Clifton Road Mosque

Following this, we reflected on the theme of gratitude from the Hindu, Christian, Bahai, Sikh and Jain religions. It was an evening full of warmth and spirituality as we observed how the concept of gratitude plays a central role in all faiths. Forty people attended from ages between 10 and 75.

- **Family Fortunes Evening at Clifton Road Mosque**

A special Family Fortunes evening at the Clifton Road Mosque was attended by over 80 people from people of different faiths, including a large group from Cotteridge Church. Ages ranged from 1 to 90 years, a true family event!



This day coincided with Remembrance Sunday and also the week of the birthday of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Reverend Duncan Strathie from St Mary's Church explained to us the significance of Remembrance Day and Sheikh Nuru enlightened us on the life of our Holy Prophet and his mission. A game of family fortunes was then played and thoroughly enjoyed by all guests. In keeping with our efforts to protect the environment, we awarded plants to all who participated in the game. A hot meal was served at the end, as people rekindled old friendships and made new friends.

- **Religiophobia**

Has our country become afraid of religious rights and views? How can faiths come together to uphold religious freedoms? How can we work peacefully together with all denominations to retain rights? These are just some of the questions addressed at the MEND (Muslim Engagement and Development) seminar.

Robust discussion took place following presentations were given by Pauline Gallagher, founder of Catholic Family Voice; Dr Stef Keris, Muslim Chaplain and Polyglot Lecturer; and Dr Peter Rookes, Secretary Birmingham Council of Faiths and Independent Community Facilitator, Crown Prosecution Service Hate Crime Scrutiny Panel.

- **Listening to people of different faith experience**

This meeting was based on the book: 'Perceptions of Christianity from People of Different Faiths', by the Revd Richard Tetlow, vicar of Ladywood, 1989-2008, based on his interfaith experience then and to present-day.

Four of the five different faith contributors to the book – one unavoidably absent – sat together in St Anne's Church, Moseley and with the author enjoyed discussing their differences. 20-25 participants listened, then joined in. The book has the unusual approach of giving an opportunity for its readers, likely to be mostly Christian, to read and so listen to what other persons in their British lives – Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Sikh - think of them. How much do we really listen to one another in life, not least over major issues? Two of these discussed from the book were Christian attitudes, too often assumed superior, and – quite naturally, God. Both are too often avoided in polite interfaith conversation. The evening, led by Richard Tetlow, was an inspiring model of honest and trusting dialogue between members of religious faiths.

- **Dialogue and Dinner**

The Manaret Foundation at Sheldon hosted a dinner and dialogue in their new mosque. A number of issues were discussed, including their youth programme and welcoming new members to the mosque. Ruth Tetlow is in the process of facilitating a meeting between the mosque and a local church to foster a relationship and cooperation between them

Other Events

In addition to the events reported on above, the following also took place:-

Celebration of the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of the Báb, Faiths Gallery, BMAG, Chamberlain Square

Multifaith Diwali, Bandi Chhor and Guru Nanak Celebration, QE Hospital Multifaith Centre

Faith Guiding, Progressive Synagogue, 1 Roseland Way B15 1 HD

Multifaith Appreciation, for Birmingham City University Students.

Thank you

This was such an interesting (extended) week full of so many different events. I attended two-thirds of the events and was delighted to see people of different faiths and cultures enjoying their time together. My grateful thanks to everyone who organised events and took the trouble to write a report and thank you to everyone who participated. I am grateful, also, to my daughter, Sara-Jane, who accompanied me to some of the events and helped me in formatting this report.

I look forward to your support again for Interfaith Week 8-15th November 2020.

Blessings

Peter

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