

Elmbridge Multi-faith Forum

Spring 2007 (Newsletter Number 8)



Since our Autumn/Winter 2006 Newsletter we have:-

- Published printed copies of our Winter 2006 Newsletter.
- Visited the Sikh Gurdwara in Hounslow.
- Been invited to the Annual Sikh Peace Symposium at the Bait-ul-Futuh Ahmadiyya Mosque in Morden.
- Provided our second day of "Faith Training" for Surrey Police Cadets.
- Updated and improved our website.
- Contributed to the University of Surrey Festival of Faith.
- Welcomed a group of young people and teachers (Muslims and Christians) from the Fehmi Agani School in Gjakova, Kosova.
- Met Guy Wilkinson, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Advisor on Inter-Faith Relations.
- Organised a debate on "Integration and Cohesion", with a curry supper on 8th May,

Membership

We are always pleased to welcome new individuals as members. The annual subscription is £10, for which you will receive the quarterly newsletters and priority booking for events and visits as well as invitations to meetings.

We now have almost 100 members.

For enquiries about membership, please contact the Membership Secretary:

Phyllis Woodhead
01372 468783



The EMF Newsletter in Print

Previously we have sent our Newsletters by e-mail or by "snail mail" to our members and a limited number of interested friends.

The Newsletter and our Flyers are our main means of publicity. With the help of the Faith Communities Development Foundation Grant we were able to send information to Faith Centres and to place single copies in libraries, day centres, council offices, surgeries, etc.

We found that we were being asked for copies to take away and, as a result, again with the help of our Grant we published the Winter Newsletter as an A5 booklet, had 1,000 copies printed and made these widely available for people to take away and read. These have proved very popular and led to membership applications, requests for further information and increased demand to take part in our events.

We hope to be able to publish the present and future Newsletters in a similar way, subject always to the availability of funding.



Visit to The Sikh Gurdwara, Hounslow - 14 March 2007



The visit to the Sikh Gurdwara was originally planned for the 8th February. However, this was the

one day this year when snow fell and there were warnings of icy roads and advice not to travel if possible. In consequence we postponed the visit to Wednesday 14th March. Our group totalled twenty one, and our coach left at 5.00, reaching the Gurdwara at 6.00: on schedule, and in complete comfort

With appropriate reverence we took off our shoes and put a cover over our heads (women AND men).

We were met by a “teacher” who was asked to look after us.

We arrived at the time of the evening prayers (after sunset). We were taken up into the “sanctuary” where a “Custodian” was sitting cross legged and chanting from a book. They have no priests, and anyone can read from the texts.

People would go in, bow down reverently, bring some fruit or food and possibly put money into a receptacle anonymously.

We stayed for a short while on the rug covered floor cross legged and enjoyed the spirituality of the place.

We were then taken to a private room, but on the way we were shown a large picture of the “Harmandir Sahib” or the “Golden Temple” in Amritsar, India, the most historical religious centre for the Sikhs. However, it is not mandatory as a place of worship or pilgrimage.

History and Characteristics: The Sikh Religion was started by Guru Nanak in 1469 A.D. within what was then an all Hindu society. Witnessing the surrounding

reverence for animals (cows etc.), Guru Nanak taught that prayer should be to “the Invisible God” only, and that one should use the brain to find “good” and “bad”.

Guru Nanak was born to a wealthy family and His father gave Him some money to make business. As He went out of His family palace He witnessed such poverty and spent all His money on these poor. He then told His father: I have done “true business”.

He then taught that money should be distributed to the poor and should not be hoarded. We should share food, happiness and sorrow with others. “We know about birth and its process, but with death we do not know what will happen, as it is God’s duty”.

Sikhs are taught sacrifice and courage. They keep their hair and beard so that they remain as natural as possible, and to remind them of God. They keep their hair clean. They wear a bangle to remind them not to do anything bad. They keep a dagger for defence, and they maintain clean underwear to remind them to refrain from “malicious thought”.

After Guru Nanak there followed nine other Gurus (ten in all). The tenth, Guru Gobind Singh (who died in 1708), announced that people did not need an Inspired Guru anymore, but left them with the “Khalsa” or “Pure” one, that is a leader who could demonstrate purity and the principles of the Founding Gurus. Some Gurus were executed, but this is considered part of the sacrifice that helped maintain the Sikh faithful and strong.

Sikhs have detached themselves from Hinduism and Islam, and so do not have rituals such as fasting, pilgrimage etc.

They believe in the one true God who belongs to anyone, and can be reached from any direction. Thus the “Golden Temple” has entry doors from all directions.

Sikhism teaches equality of all people, gender, rich and poor.

Their Gurdwara is open 24/7 and food is available all the time to anyone who enters and wants to eat or drink.

We all testified to the neatness, cleanliness, orderliness and spirituality of the Gurdwara.

We were offered freshly cooked food, and delicious tea and drinks. There were young and old, all in great harmony with each other, and enjoying the ambiance of a family gathering where all are equal, and all share everything.

One is tempted to detail more information, but that can only detract from the beauty of the reception we had and the supreme value of their teachings, that the human’s endeavour in this life is to strive to achieve in the after life, through utmost dedication and purity, the ultimate goal of presence in the Sanctum of God,

Our coach and excellent driver picked us up at about 8.00 pm, and we arrived back to our point of departure refreshed and uplifted.



Annual Ahmadiyya Peace Symposium

Annual Ahmadiyya Peace Symposium was held at the Bait-ul-Futuh Mosque on the 24th March and our members were warmly invited to attend. The visit began with an opportunity to tour the Mosque which was followed by a reception, speeches and dinner.

As always our welcome was warm, our hosts were charming, the speeches interesting and the food most enjoyable.

We are grateful to be included in this event.



University of Surrey Festival of Faith 19th – 23rd February 2007

We were honoured that our chairman Nabil Mustapha was invited to speak on this occasion. He has kindly summarised his talk:

BUILDING INTERFAITH UNDERSTANDING

INTERFAITH MULTIFAITH No FAITH

In considering these various terms describing diversity in Faith within our communities, interfaith and multifaith are commonly used interchangeably, and contrast with “no faith”. Intellectually the first two terms convey different meanings, while “no faith” is clear.

People adhering to any faith do so in the belief that their faith has been inspired by God, through a prophet. It follows that there is effectively one God, but different “mouthpieces” i.e. prophets. It also follows that God must have a purpose for sending different prophets to different peoples at different times in the history of the world. It could also easily be understood that that purpose must have been the guidance for the world and providing the laws and teachings aimed at enhancing humanity’s progress and civilisation.

A logical deduction could easily be entertained that as a result, people adhere to the faith or teachings they individually feel comfortable with. Society, however, will reap the benefit of the development of an ethos, whereby that same individual, while enjoying this freedom of belief, and the individuality and uniqueness, would also feel that he/she is part of “the whole” of society.

In this respect, the concept of “**Uni-Faith**” would contribute to that feeling of enjoying one’s faith, but also recognising the oneness of God and oneness of the purpose of religion, and ultimately that this contributes to the cohesion and unity of our society.



Police Faith Day

Our second “Faith Day” of training for Police Cadets was held on Thursday 15th February at Ember Court, Molesey. About 40 cadets attended and were given talks by

members of the EMF on “Buddhism”, “Hinduism”, “Judaism” “Christianity”, “Islam”, “Sikhism” and “other faiths”.

Each session lasted 40 minutes, including an opportunity for questions, and the day concluded with an Open Forum. The aim was to give cadets an understanding of the basics of each faith and also to make them aware of particular sensitivities of which police should take account in dealing with members of those faiths.

It has been suggested that we should run “Faith Days” for other groups including schools and Day Centres.



Website

Our web site was originally set up by Hany and Liz Mustapha. As they have a business to run they have now passed over the development of the site to David Robinson, one of our Christian members, who has kindly agreed to join the Executive Committee as “Web Master”. We are grateful to Hany, Liz and David.

Please take a look at the web site which includes all our previous Newsletters and various “Faith” addresses.

www.elmbridgemultifaith.org.uk.

Visit by Kosovar Children 2nd to 6th April 2007

When two Imams from Kosova spoke to EMF in 2005 on ‘Aspects

of Islam’, food was provided free, but we invited donations towards work in Kosovar schools. We had hoped to provide an English teacher, but this proved impracticable. Instead, we paid for the Director of the Fehmi Agani School, the English teacher and 5 enthusiastic and able students of different faiths, aged 15 to 17, to visit their email friends in this country.

The visit was also subsidised by the Rotary Club of Esher and St Andrew’s Church, Cobham.



The visitors stayed with local families, were received by the Mayor, visited local schools, London, including Parliament, and enjoyed a fish and chip supper and Beetle Drive.



CONSULTATIVE EVENING

**Held at Claygate village Hall, on
Tuesday 8 May**

_PURPOSE OF THE MEETING:

Elmbridge Multi-faith Forum felt the need for an effort to engage our members as well as all concerned,

in enhancing "Integration and Cohesion" within our Society. The Forum thus decided to hold this consultative meeting in order to study and discuss:

"The Contribution of Faiths to Integration and Cohesion"

The meeting was honoured by the Deputy Mayor (currently Mayor) of Elmbridge, Mrs Rosemary Dane and Mr Dane.

An initial short period of socialising was followed by a dinner, mainly of curried dishes.

The following speakers then explained briefly how their respective faiths (Jewish, Islamic, Christian, Ahmadiyya and Hindu) could contribute to integration and cohesion in Elmbridge and in the wider community:

Rabbi Danny Rich:

Secretary General of the Liberal Synagogue of UK

Imam Shahid Hussein:

Of the Muslim Mosque at Croydon, and the Central Mosque at Regents' Park London.

Reverend Richard Cook:

Of the Church of England Church at Woking

Mr. Shahid Ghauri:

Of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

Ms. Anjali Paul:

A Hindu lady and a writer.

This was followed by a free and open discussion from the floor. Contributors included Lynne Owen, Asst. Chief Constable of Surrey,

and Richard Morris, Chief Superintendent, North Surrey Police.

The purpose of the discussion was to look at the avenues, and perhaps some practical steps, that the EMF, as a forum promoting the values of faith, could initiate within the community or co-operate with the statutory agencies in pursuit of the stated purpose of the meeting. Suggestions were lively and can be summarised, although not exhaustively, as follows

To look at avenues and groups within society that would be receptive to the call for steps towards greater integration & cohesion, such as

1. "Residents' Associations", Youth groups, Schools, and "Day Centres".
2. To approach Voluntary organisations, Faith groups, local Charities, and Statutory services such as the Police and the Borough Council.
3. Actions suggested ranged from: Conducting faith (or cross faith) studies and programmes, contacting and visiting different faith groups and communities, conducting youth projects and targeting grassroot youth groups
4. Looking at projects that engage the statutory services, especially the Police, to work with faith (and non-faith) groups so as to bring these services closer to the grassroots.
5. Engaging the local press and media.

The way forward:

1. The creation of circles of activity and allowing "organic" growth of the concept.
2. Sharing facilities, such as "Community Centres"
3. Sharing good values and good practices.
4. Requesting support from the Borough Council, such as a contact officer, allowing the use of their facilities, and taking a lead on some projects.
5. Contacting schools.
6. Arranging "fun" events such as a "Sandown run"
7. Sharing contact addresses and e-mails, especially of the EMF members, particularly to allow further flow of suggestions and ideas.

The meeting came to a close at about 10.00 pm, and the spirit of satisfaction was quite evident. Indeed, some suggestions were received after the event and the EMF Executive will be studying the way forward in their meetings.

It is important to note that the EMF is very conscious of the fact that this endeavour is quite ambitious, and may be beyond its immediate capability. But the Chinese saying goes: "The journey of a thousand miles starts with one step". We hope that we have taken the first step.

Nabil M Mustapha

Coming Events

Thursday, 28th June

Visit to the Christian Science Church, Claygate at 7 for 7.30pm. Our visit will include a tour of the Church, a talk on, 'Aspects of the Christian Science faith' and light refreshments.

The Church is situated at 45, Hare Lane, Claygate Surrey and there is parking available at the Church.

Please note

Tuesday, 10th July 2007 at 7 pm
Annual General Meeting.
in the Elmbridge Civic Centre,
Rooms 45 and 46.

Saturday, 21st July 2007 **Buddhapadipa Temple**

We have been invited to visit and tour the Buddhapadipa Temple at 14 Calonne Road, Wimbledon from 1 – 3pm. The visit will conclude with afternoon tea in the Temple gardens.

Please let the Secretary know if you can attend these events

Saturday and Sunday, 28-29 July **Ahmadiyya Convention**

Again we are invited to send representatives to this annual event. If you would like an invitation for either the Saturday or Sunday, please let Geoff Morris know a.s.a.p.

Saturday, 13th October, 2007

Annual Gala Evening,

Again we have been invited by Claremont Fan Court School where there will be an evening of exotic foods and entertainment.

Aspects of Hinduism

Following the impressive visit to the Hindu Temple at Neasden, we hope to organise a talk by a Hindu speaker at a date to be announced.



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