

Inter Faith Week: some of the many contributions by Methodist Church members

The Touchstone Centre (Bradford) held the fourth interfaith event at Haworth Road Methodist Church on 21 November 2009.

This event celebrated the first national interfaith week, through an exhibition of 'Sacred Faith Symbols', which embraced worldwide religions, present were the; Buddhist, Baha'i, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh and Christian faiths.



The exhibition showcased a myriad of shapes colours and textures from all of the faiths highlighting the richness and diversity that our world community holds; it also represented items that have shared symbolic meaning, one similarity that I spotted were the prayer beads which are used in the Buddhist, Hindu (japa mala) Baha'i, Muslim (tasbeeh), Christians (rosary) and Sikh (mala-prayer beads) faiths.

This highlighted the importance of symbols, on one level it offers a person identity and on another level it is an opportunity to unify with people of different faiths through ritual and placed value; this could also be said about the Sacred or Holy books which each faith displayed.



During the event a Buddhist monk Kelsang Khechog from the Kashyapa Kadampa Buddhist Centre discussed what his personal Buddha statue signified for him and that was the symbol represented his own spiritual potential, something which can be translated to any faiths group. I am sure I was not the only one asking myself 'can I be as spiritual and enlightened as Kelsang Khechog'

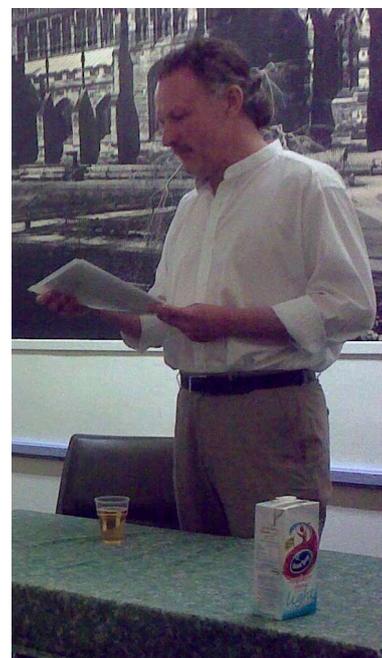
Through group prayer we were able to connect our religious beliefs and values regarding the environment something that I feel will bring faiths together more in the future; the exhibition was an interesting and enjoyable way of discovering what faiths interlink the community that we live in and how that common unity is embraced. The evening closed with sharing of food from different traditions.

Report by Jennifer Williams, a student at the University of Bradford

Pictures: The Touchstone Centre, Bradford.

The Revd Gareth Jones, Inter-Faith Development Officer, West Midlands Faith Forum, who is also a member of the Methodist Church/United Reformed Church Inter Faith Relations Committee reported:

Inter Faith Week in the West Midlands began with a launch attended by more than 100 people in the Council House, Birmingham, and closed with an event entitled *Climate Change...a Matter of Faith* in Wolverhampton. Between these two occasions, and in some cases before or after, dozens of events took place across the region, from Lichfield to Worcester, Leamington to Burton-upon-Trent. As it was also Islam Awareness Week, the IAW organisers worked very closely with the Inter Faith Week planning groups, especially in Coventry and Birmingham, and publicised each other's activities.



In addition to the launch and closing events, my travels during the week took me, among other things, to

- a cutting edge conference on *Women of Faith* organised by the inter-faith networks in Dudley and Worcestershire
- the launch in Birmingham of Jubilee Debt Campaign's new national inter-faith project
- a panel of speakers on the subject of civilisation and spiritual values, organised by a Baha'i group and hosted by a Muslim learning centre
- a Yoga Camp arranged by Hindus in Coventry
- a celebration dinner for Islam Awareness Week
- *Celebrating Faiths: Sharing Values*, a joint initiative between an Ethnic Minority Action Partnership and a multi-faith forum
- a talk on inter-faith relations from a police perspective

It was an excellent week, full of new initiatives and regular events given a new slant. Nor was it just the already committed who supported events; I saw many new faces during the course of the week. Most of all, it was a week that energised people and caught their imagination, and whose effects I'm sure will continue to be felt and appreciated.

Picture: Joy Barrow

The Revd Raymond Garfoot, in a report entitled 'Inter Faith Week can be fun' writes:

Interfaith can be fun, and over fifty people from local Methodist churches experienced this together with representatives of other churches and faiths at a meeting during National Interfaith Week at High Street Methodist Church, Leagrave, Luton. The Revd Raymond Garfoot introduced the theme of "Living with our Neighbours of Different Faiths". Ryad Khodabocus, the Community Relations Development Worker, gave an audio-visual presentation on the work of Luton Council of Faiths. After discussion and refreshments, everyone held hands in a circle and took it in turn to say "peace" in their own language. Despite bad national publicity and the trouble caused by a small number of racist extremists, the general message was that the faiths get on very well together in Luton and everyone present enjoys living in a multifaith community.

Luton Council of Faiths also arranged an evening of Jokes from across Faiths and Cultures on the Friday. This meeting launched the Luton Hindu Mandir as the country's first Fairtrade Hindu Temple, part of the Council of Faiths project to make Luton a Fairtrade Town. The Central Mosque is shortly expected to become the second Fairtrade mosque in the country. On the Saturday, Luton Council of Faiths launched a Faith Map of Luton. It also edits a fortnightly Faith Matters Column in the Luton News and is beginning a monthly multifaith Wayside Pulpit in the Herald and Post.

The Revd John C Newton, a former member of the Methodist Church Inter Faith Relations Committee, who in retirement continues to be actively involved in Inter Faith Relations in the Slough area where he lives, participated in the following events during Inter Faith Week:



Saturday: The formal opening of an Exhibition by the Mayor (Councillor Bal - a leading Sikh). This was well attended by a cross section of the faiths represented - Buddhist, Brahma Kumari, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh - all of whom had displays. This was followed by "Sikhs in the Square", a presentation by the Sikh community in the Town Square.

Despite the wind and rain, this was viewed by at least 500 people, many shoppers stopping to share. Langar was served, and speeches were given and kirtan took place.



Sunday: I preached on the subject of Inter Faith Relations at the Ledgers Road Church, Thames Valley Circuit.

Monday: I went to the Sri Guru Singh Sabha gurdwara for langar with a group of Sikh pensioners.

Tuesday: I spent the early afternoon viewing the "Via Dolorosa" at St. Mary's Church. This is a multi-media presentation of the Stations of the Cross interpreted by people of different faiths. Earlier this had been viewed by a group of visiting clergy from Sweden, who now want to use it in Sweden.

Later that day I attended the Open Evening at the Hindu Temple where there was a presentation on Hinduism, followed by Arti, and a community meal.

Wednesday and Thursday: I participated in the 'Borrow a Person' sessions. Unfortunately "borrowers" were scarce, but some valuable dialogue took place among the people waiting to be "borrowed".

Friday: I attended a lunch at the Haveli Restaurant, at which about 150 people present many of whom were either Sikh or Muslim, however there were also some Hindus, Buddhists and Christians. During lunch several people had been invited to speak on the subject of 'Religious Festivals'. In later that day, I attended an Open Evening at the Diamond Road Mosque. I was the only non-Muslim present had the opportunity to share in dialogue between the two Mosque communities, and later attended evening (salat) prayers.

Pictures: The Revd John C Newton