

'It's not our problem. There are no people of other religions near us'

I still hear this as I travel around the country. I am tempted to reply, 'Are you sure? Are you sure there are no Buddhists, Muslims or Jews near you? And why do you use the word, problem? Could you not see the presence of people of other faiths as an opportunity - for hospitality, for friendship, for the mutual sharing of what it means to have faith?'

This said many Methodists live in places where it is not easy to meet people of other faiths. There is no synagogue, mosque, gurdwara or temple. Individual families of other faiths there may be, but not communities. The religious diversity of cities such as Birmingham and Leicester could be on another planet. What makes the person of another faith tick, what motivates their actions and inspires their prayers can only be glimpsed through rare media coverage of such things as the Kumbhamela (the Hindu pilgrimage gathering in India) or the Hajj (the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca). Even where there is a will to encounter those of other faiths, there may not seem to be a way.

This might have been what Christians in Cumbria had believed before an ecumenical inter-faith task group, a body set up by Churches Together in Cumbria, arranged 'Meet Your Neighbour', a visit to Hindu and Muslim communities in Preston, in April. Ninety people went, in two coaches, one from South and one

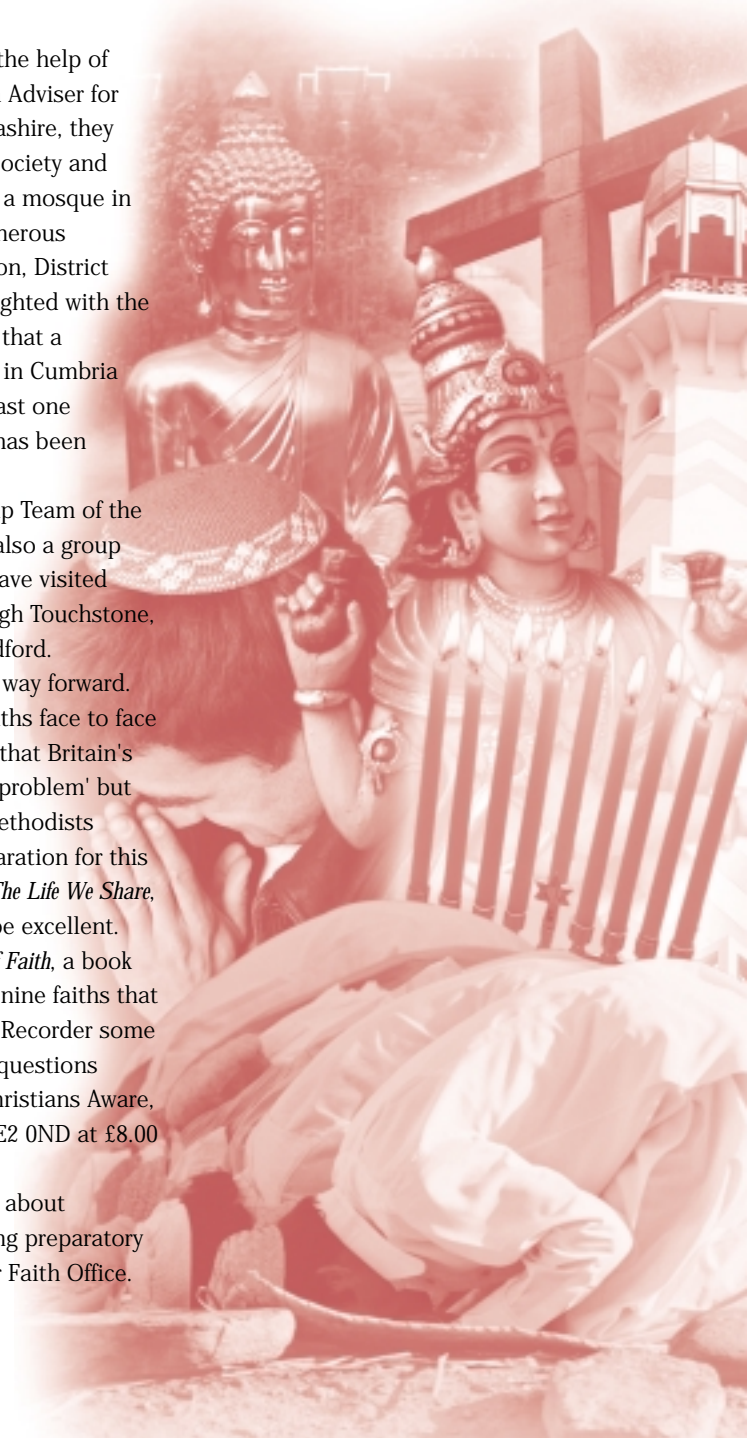
from North Cumbria. With the help of Dale Barton, the Inter Faith Adviser for Churches Together in Lancashire, they visited the Gujarat Hindu Society and temple in the morning and a mosque in the afternoon, receiving generous welcomes. Rev David Emison, District Chair for Cumbria, was delighted with the visit's success and told me that a reciprocal visit to churches in Cumbria was a possibility. And at least one ongoing discussion group has been formed.

Similarly, the Leadership Team of the York and Hull District and also a group from Sedbergh, Cumbria, have visited mosques in Bradford through Touchstone, Methodism's centre in Bradford.

This kind of visit is one way forward. Meeting people of other faiths face to face is the best way to discover that Britain's religious diversity is not 'a problem' but an opportunity, one that Methodists should not ignore. As preparation for this kind of visit, the CD pack, *The Life We Share*, described overleaf, would be excellent. Another resource is *Paths of Faith*, a book containing the accounts of nine faiths that appeared in the Methodist Recorder some years ago, with discussion questions added. (obtainable from Christians Aware, 2 Saxby Street, Leicester LE2 0ND at £8.00 +£1.50 p&p)

If you would like advice about arranging a visit or accessing preparatory resources, contact the Inter Faith Office.

Elizabeth Harris



The Life We Share: a CD Pack

All people of faith share common life experiences such as loving and being loved, struggling for a better world, offering hospitality and preparing for death. This CD pack, jointly produced by the Methodist Church and the Anglican mission agency, USPG, starts from this. The CD features fifteen people from five faiths speaking personally and frankly about nine life themes from birth to death. Activity Sheets and Bible studies accompany this to aid group discussion. And there is also a booklet of material for worship and reflection drawn again from the five faiths.

The Pack encourages a movement in two directions: outwards to a deeper understanding of the five faiths, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism; inwards to renewed awareness of what it means to be Christian in a religiously diverse society.

Cost: £10.00

Date of Publication: September 2003

For more information:

Contact the Inter Faith Office

Resources

Interreligious Insight: a journal of dialogue and engagement

With Hans Kung and the Dalai Lama among its patrons, this new venture tackles critical issues such as ecology, globalisation, peace-making, and what binds together and divides the religions of the world. Individual annual subscription for 4 issues: £24.00.

For a subscription form or a sample back copy, contact the Inter Faith

Office or: Interreligious Insight, c/o World Congress of Faiths, London Inter Faith Centre, 125 Salusbury Road, London NW6 6RG.

Website: www.interreligiousinsight.org



Shap Pictorial Calendar 2004 (From the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education)

A4 in size, each month is accompanied by a top-quality image of a festival from that month with background information, providing an excellent educational resource.

Cost: £6.50

Order from: The Shap Working Party, PO Box 38580, London SW1P 3XF (cheques payable to The Shap Working Party)

Courses at the United College of the Ascension, Birmingham

These courses are not just for the specialist. They are for everyone with an interest in the topic.

7-9 November 2003: 'The Life We Share': an introduction to a new CD study pack that helps Christians to a new understanding of their own faith and five others. (see far left column).

30 Jan - 1 Feb 2004: 'Art and Holy Ground': a time with Indian Christian artist, Jyoti Sahi

6 March 2004: 'Women of Faith: Forgiveness': organized by the Women of Faith Group (£20.00 incl. coffee, lunch and tea)

22-24 June 2004: Meditation in the Buddhist Tradition
3 day courses are £90.00 residential, £45.00 non-residential. Subsidies are available.

For information contact the College: Weoley Park Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6RD; e-mail: j.marks@bham.ac.uk

Week of Prayer for World Peace 12-19 October 2003

Contact the Inter Faith Office for a copy of the leaflet prepared for the Week, containing prayers from the major world faiths on themes such as 'The Vulnerable', 'Human Arrogance and Pride' and 'What Hatred and Intolerance can do'.

Book Corner

Marcus Braybrooke, 1000 World Prayers, Alresford, John Hunt Publishing, 2003, £12.99

This offers not a hundred, but a thousand prayers from different countries and religious traditions. Arranged thematically around God, the life cycle and life commitments, some cover a page, some, just two lines. The variety is staggering: from the traditional to the modern, from poetry to prose, from the liturgical to the deeply personal. And all the major faiths are included. This is a hands-on book, to use and use again.



Further Information

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House group leaders

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