



A Happy New Year to you all!

There has now been a whole year's-worth of issues. I hope some of you are finding it a useful way of knowing what is going on and has happened in the SE region. Slowly, more local groups are sending me news of their events and I hope that with this issue having one or two photographs with reports will add interest. South East England is a large region with probably the most diverse population in the country. Most world faiths are represented, and with this diversity comes a responsibility to respect those whose faith differs from our own; we need to try to learn what we can about other people's beliefs and how they affect their lives.

We can all too easily assume that other faith groups are organised in the same way as our own, and that their authority chain is the same as our own. However, this can lead to misunderstandings: many faith groups have a firm division between the prayer and ritual life of the community, and the social and economic activity of the congregation. Within some faith traditions there is a defined hierarchy, with well-defined and authoritative expressions of the teaching and ritual of the faith, but in others there is no single person who can be asked to explain or speak for their religious tradition – and in them all many variations exist. One way that dialogue can help is to realize that these differences are present, so that acting with this knowledge we can ensure that the best (or right) person is asked to attend celebrations and dialogue sessions.

As I introduce this January 2015 Newsletter, the Muslim communities are celebrating the Birth of the Prophet Mohamed, but I do not know how families will be celebrating this event, whether some keep it differently, or if there is a common core with additions which depend on a particular cultural background. If someone would like to explain these things to me, I would be very pleased and would pass it on to all our readers.

But may I ask you all to make a New Year's Resolution: to send in notices and reports of your own – your Newsletter depends in large part on what you provide!

Bede Gerrard

EVENTS REPORTS

WHO CARES? CONFERENCE on FAITH, CULTURE AND MENTAL HEALTH RELATIONSHIP - SEEFF (Thames Valley Sub-region),

Berkshire NHS Mental Health Trust and Oxford C of E Diocese

16 October, St James's Church Conference Centre, Finchampstead

The morning session of the conference was chaired by Dr Hugh Boulter, Secretary of Oxford Diocesan Committee for Inter-faith Concerns.

Mr Chris Khoo, FRCS, High Sheriff, Royal County of Berkshire, a surgeon and interested in the necessity of treating the whole person, welcomed the speakers and delegates. His opening remarks set the scene where the idea of medical treatment was linked to the wholeness of the human being – body, mind and spirit – and these three elements of the person needed to be brought together to appreciate the ideal of good medical practice. (We are particularly grateful to

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Mr Khoo for coming to open the Conference – he had been unwell, but he had thought that the Conference was so particularly important that he had been determined to be present and to show his commitment to the practice of both faith and medicine.)

In the morning session, two keynote speakers: Dr Chetna Kang, Executive Committee Member, Royal College of Psychiatrists Spiritual Interests Group, Hindu Pastor and Co-Chair, National Spirituality and Mental Health Forum talked about *The Advantages and Problems of Having a Faith in Relation to Mental Health*, while her respondent, Dr Khadija Masood, Locum Consultant Psychiatrist, General Adult Psychiatry, Reading CMHT (North Sector), Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, brought a Muslim perspective on the same topic. Between the two medical speakers there was the important opportunity to hear from a user of psychiatric services on how they felt about care, and their insistence that there is more to a person than the symptoms that the medical professionals are treating.

After lunch (which gave people time to meet and talk), Canon Bede Gerrard, Chair of South East England Faiths Forum chaired the afternoon session. Its key speakers, Prof. Rob Poole and Prof. Catherine Robinson spoke about the *Professional Boundaries between the Practitioner and the Patient*. They are Co-Directors of the Centre for Mental Health and Society at the School of Social Sciences, Bangor University. Prof. Poole is a Professor of Social Psychiatry, Prof. Robinson is a Professor of Social Policy Research. The Bangor research centre has been granted funding to examine the boundaries between psychiatric treatment and the practice of a patient's faith. They spoke from the perspective of people who do not have religious belief and gave some examples of how at times the professional boundaries are overstepped and how this can be detrimental to treatment.

Their respondent Revd Rachel Wadey talked about *What makes a Complete Person?* She is a Mental Health Chaplain at the Department of Spiritual Care of Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. Rachel spoke about the positive aspects of including a person's spiritual growth alongside their medical condition. She agreed with the previous speakers that there are times when the intervention of faith can be wrong. She hoped that an understanding of the right boundaries could be achieved, and that just because there had been unfortunate examples of inappropriate intervention this ought not to mean that all aspects of faith are excluded from the treatment plans for patients.

Both the morning and afternoon sessions ended in discussion groups, each with two facilitators from both faith and mental health areas. The groups looked at issues that the speakers had raised, looking at the problems in the particular areas, and what might be done to efficiently manage these problems so they became opportunities.

The day ended with a plenary question and answer session. The panel was comprised of four of the speakers and a service user. This brought out some of the points raised in the discussion groups. and enabled the panel members to clarify matters of detail with the conference members.

Sixty people attended conference, providing a diversity of attendees: sixteen mental health professionals, six mental health service users, twenty people from faith communities, eleven from social services and other community organisations, and seven others.

Some feedback about the conference

The whole day has been fascinating – with depth and integrity.

Helpful to look at reasons for having spiritual assessment and to see how faith can get in the way if people aren't treated as individuals regardless of culture or faith.

I found all of it very interesting and useful, and felt there was the right balance between presentations and break-out groups.

I really enjoyed the conference; it was the best one I have so far attended.

It was certainly interesting – the topics are so thorny and complicated, but I think that in such a difficult area when perhaps no one is completely sure what to do, the situation really does encourage 'free thinking'.

It was very useful to meet representatives from other agencies who could support young people and provide workshops at our service.

The mix between service users, professionals and open discussion in small groups made the day rich in content and spirit.

There was a good amount of networking time between sessions over refreshments.

All the keynote speakers were 5-star! Thank you very much – lots to think about.

I found Chetna Kang to be really inspirational and a breath of fresh air.

Liked what makes a complete person and advantages and problems of having faith.

Having breakout groups was a very good idea.

I found the group discussions valuable, and networking was great.

Both sessions were facilitated brilliantly, giving everyone a chance to speak.

INTER FAITH WEEK 2014

Events

The response to this year's Inter Faith Week has been very positive. Over 300 events in England, Northern Ireland and Wales were registered, and can now be viewed, on the Inter Faith Week website www.interfaithweek.org – more continue to be discovered through monitoring reports on the internet.

This year saw week-long programmes in a number of places which had not previously held one. In Rugby, the new Mayor, Councillor Ramesh Srivastava convened a special inter faith working group to put together the programme of events.

Clergy exchange, classroom inter faith dialogues, quizzes, suppers for the homeless cooked by members of different faith communities, tree plantings, faith trails, and much more – the Week's events were, as usual, many and various. This year saw some tough issues taken as discussion subjects, such as international political and religious divides, and protecting children from abuse.

A wide spectrum of organisations marked the Week, and some, such as the National Union of Students, marked both Inter Faith Week and Scottish Interfaith Week (within a 'Faith and Belief Fortnight').

Media

Inter Faith Week gained some very good publicity, being picked up widely in everything from blogs to local radio interviews, and pieces in the *Times* and on the BBC website – which featured the awarded photographs from the Congregational Insurance Competition, 'Faith Through a Lens', run in association with IFN and Churches Together in England. A new section of the Inter Faith Week website was added: www.interfaithweek.org/media/2014-media-coverage, detailing events or activities. See if your event is listed; if not, contact Ashley Beck interfaithweek@interfaith.org.uk.

Use of Twitter was extensive this year, with a high volume of traffic during the Week about events taking place. Tweets about the Week were widely re-tweeted and a carousel of the Twitter-feed was placed on the Inter Faith Week website. IFN also used Facebook to profile events and continues to post stories and reflections on the Week. At least one organisation ran a week-long social media campaign.

Feedback

If your organisation held an event for Inter Faith Week in England, Northern Ireland or Wales, IFN would very much value your feedback on Inter Faith Week 2014. Your response can help it continue to develop the Week as a highly effective way to profile, and widen involvement in, inter faith activity and cooperation, and to add value to the work of the many organisations sharing these important aims.

Give IFN your feedback – www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/139357PKHMF.

There is also a space at the end to use if you would like to send IFN a short account of your event. This short electronic questionnaire will remain live until 22 January. If you prefer to have a Word version, contact Ashley Beck at Interfaithweek@interfaith.org.uk.

Inter faith understanding and cooperation between people of all ages is important, but there are unique factors about young people's involvement of. The event was a chance to talk about this, as well as to recognise the great work already under way. It was also a chance to discuss how

organisations might work more effectively to enable young people to gain a good level of religious literacy and develop the skills for successful engagement with an increasingly diverse society. Grant funding helped support videoing and photographing of the day. A microsite within the IFN website to include *vox pops* and a short video are currently under development. If your organisation is developing inter faith work with or for young people and you have not already been in touch with the IFN office, it would be glad to hear from you with details: ifnet@interfaith.org.uk

OXFORD COMMUNITIES AGAINST EXTREMISM EVENT

30 November, Oxford Spires Academy

Jointly Organised by the Oxford Foundation and Oxford Council of Faiths

I am delighted to inform you that this event, was a huge success. It was so worthwhile, with the lecture theatre crowded for the service of 'Readings and Reflections'. This was followed by time to sit and talk with those from the many faith communities whose members were there – Baha'is, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Humanists, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, and people of no faith, along with people invited in their official capacity.

Included in the service booklet were many messages of Support and Prayers, from people from such diverse backgrounds as a Greek Orthodox Archbishop, a Chief Fire Officer, an MP and the President of a Chamber of Commerce – the messages, with the Service, will be a useful resource.



'How do I love thee? Let me count the ways', wrote Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The people of Oxford had an opportunity to add another way on 30 November, with a Service of Readings and Reflection held at Oxford Spires Academy. About 200 people came to show their love for their community and their neighbour.

With people still arriving, the service began at 2.00 pm, introduced by Imam Monawar Hussain, founder of The Oxford Foundation and one of the driving people

who had the original idea. Monawar brought us all into a frame of mind to accept that from within our own communities and faith traditions we were all responsible for atrocities.

He reminded us that for evil to flourish all that good people had to do was remain silent. Determined that the 'good people' of Oxford will not remain silent, 'The Oxford Foundation' and 'Oxford Council of Faiths' had planned the coming together of people from all faiths and none to say firmly and resolutely that we are **United FOR Peace and United AGAINST Extremism**.

Bishop Colin Fletcher, acting bishop of Oxford, opened our service with a call to remember our neighbour and the call that all faiths make to instruct us to love our neighbour as ourselves. This was followed by prayers and reflections by people from many faith traditions. We sang, to a Jewish folk tune, a song derived from the prophet Micah calling on us to forge our swords into ploughshares so there could be no more war. Penny Faust, Chair of Oxford Council of Faiths concluded the service by asking us all to join in a 'Pledge for Peace'.

Then food and conversation – finding out that people had come from far and wide, from the Cotswolds, Birmingham, Didcot, Abingdon, Southampton, Eton, as well as many from Oxford itself.

The 'great and the good' were there with the representatives of civic society, public services, faith groups, voluntary organisations, politicians and national leaders, had sent greetings, brought together in a booklet with the service.

The food provided by Aziz restaurant, was enjoyed by all and helped to ensure a lively level of conversation and people kept arriving even when the Service was over to share in fellowship and emphasise that it is only through getting to know each other we can build friendships which will work for peace and eradicate extremism. All who might have wanted to say something were asked to write their messages in books provided in the dining hall.

It was rich and rewarding afternoon, giving us much pause for thought, and to start to consider 'What next'? www.theoxfordfoundation.com/#!/united-for-peace/cbfl

Extremism, from both the far right and religious elements, will not go away overnight, but the most powerful weapon for defeating it is through communities being absolutely united in the shared values of love, compassion for the needy and vulnerable in our society and respect for one another.

Please help us to spread the word by liking the Facebook page and sharing it with your networks. Please help us to make this a national movement to stop extremists and their hatred in its tracks. <https://www.facebook.com/communitiesunitedagainstextremism>

If you sent apologies or could not be present, please download the Service Booklet; it contains messages of support and prayer from national and local faith and civic leaders, including the Lord Lieutenant for Oxfordshire, Mr Tim Stevenson OBE, and the Prime Minister, The Rt Hon David Cameron, MP.

Download the service booklet

www.theoxfordfoundation.com/#!/united-for-peace/cbfl

Colleagues from Birmingham and Slough are exploring the possibility of holding similar events that bring communities together: *United Against Extremism*. We have also launched a national campaign to support and provide guidance for other groups who might wish to do a similar event.

VIGIL FOR PESHAWAR VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES, WOKING

The Peace Vigil was very well attended by Muslims from both Sunni and Shia communities, as well as many people from Woking's churches and other faith communities.

Dr Syed Naqvi, Imam Hafiz Hashmi and Revd Jonny Blair all spoke and prayed for peace – their words and prayers were made especially significant in that this time is important for both Muslims and Christians. Emphasis was placed upon the innocent children and their teachers and the terrible loss, by all speakers including the Mayor (who initially led the minute of silence) and M. Ilyas Varqa.

We were reminded of the importance of remembering that Islam is a religion of peace and such hatred from those who misuse the name of God for violent ends, can only be overcome through being united against it as everyone in the Vigil was.

For me, most moving were the words of Revd Phil Simpson who actually lived in Peshawar for many years and clearly felt the loss, deeply.

Many people were in tears during the Vigil, clearly touched by the words, the passion and the prayers of the speakers as their thoughts went to the children of Peshawar, cruelly taken before they could fulfil their potential in this world.

There was also great warmth generated amongst the people who attended from all backgrounds that was a joy to see.



Simon Trick, Vice Chair, Woking People of Faith

CANDLELIT VIGIL IN OXFORD FOLLOWING THE PESHAWAR MASSACRE

About 150 people including whole families gathered by candlelight at a vigil for youngsters and their teachers targeted in a Taliban terrorist attack.

More than 140 people, mostly children, were killed in the attack at the school in Peshawar, Pakistan, on Tuesday 16 December. Gunmen went from class to class shooting the students in the Pakistani Taliban's deadliest attack to date.

Oxford-based group 'United for Peace: Communities United Against Extremism' rapidly organised a vigil for the next evening, and for an hour people stood in the drizzle of Bonn Square, Oxford. Founder of The Oxford Foundation, Imam Monwar Hussain said: "The Oxford Foundation with its cohort of volunteers and mentors, is deeply saddened today to hear of the horrific terrorist attack on a school in Peshawar, Pakistan, killing and injuring over 130 children and their teachers.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families."

Abrar Chaudhury who attended the vigil with his daughter Anushka, eleven, and son Naadir, nine, said: "We are just devastated, we're just heartbroken and very depressed. I guess all we can think about is the parents and children in Pakistan, and we're hoping that this can never happen again."

EXPLORING FORGIVENESS

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FAITH & EXPERIENCE

Saturday 1 November, Bexhill Youth and Community Centre, East Sussex



Bexhill hosted Faiths in Sussex's Autumn Interfaith event, drawing together members of Interfaith Groups from all over Sussex.

Ranging from Consultant Psychiatrist Dr Shakil Malik's insightful professional analysis to Sikh, Christian, Hindu, Moslem and Jewish perspectives, seven speakers addressed the topic 'Exploring Forgiveness', drawing on personal experience informed by faith.

Dr Malik spoke of the health benefits of forgiveness and the damage to our mental health caused by bitterness and hatred, while the UK Inter Faith Networks' National Director, Dr Harriet Crabtree, drew all the contributions to a conclusion and provoked us to consider forgiveness in an inter-organisational and interfaith context.

Our local Hastings and District Interfaith Forum took the lead with funding from Community First for Central Bexhill and very active support from Bexhill Council of Christians and Jews, our local Islamic Association and Churches Together. It was a resounding success attended by 85 participants who also enjoyed the forgiveness-themed cultural contributions of the 'Come All Nations Choir', Charles Harvey's chants and the Pestalozzi Village Community's young people.

All concluded in the harmony of Tanzanian and Persian cuisine and traditional English cakes, accompanied by lively conversation and an interesting display introducing the Forgiveness Project.

WINTER FESTIVAL OF FAITHS AND CULTURES, WORTHING 2014

'Trust through friendship, peace through trust'

Very cute Chinese children singing Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, the energy of the Pestalozzi dancers, a twelve-strong choir singing in Gaelic, Gwyneth improvising melodies with guitarist Mike and Bernie on flute, Tom Cole signing Jonnie Cash, a Latvian Band singing in Russian, buffet food and cakes beyond excellence, Idol Rich puppetry and thirteen stalls from Sikh and Baha'i to Fairtrade and Interfaith Embroidery – just a sweet taste of the *2014 Winter Festival of Faiths and Cultures* – promoting trust through friendship and peace through trust!



Some Comments *I have to say you should measure the success by how much happiness and friendship you have created. I have been involved now for some years.*

You all deserve a big pat on the back. Fantastic event – keep up the good work! Excellent! Would not have missed it for the world!

SEEFF CHAIR'S SOUTH-EAST REGION REPORT

SEEFF still has no representative or contact in Kent and Medway; neither is there any real connection with people in Milton Keynes. We should try to work towards linking with these parts of the region; in addition to a large population concentration they also represent diverse mixed communities.

The Thames Valley sub region has been working towards the **WHO CARES?** Day conference and was partnered with the C/E diocese of Oxford and Berkshire NHS. (Report: pp.1,2)

Many consultative documents are being issued by NHS Trusts across the region, and it is hoped that members can have input into some of them. I attended a Healthcare seminar dealing with patient involvement in the Thames Valley. The 'discussion' was somewhat stage managed and not as useful as it could have been. Many pressure groups are involved with health, and some of these are not particularly sympathetic to faith communities. The attitude to single-sex facilities and to same sex-carers is inconsistent, and some Trusts are very resistant to the latter concept.

World conflict has stirred up some hate crime in parts of the SE and communities need help to resist polarisation on the issues of Middle East War, Israel / Gaza and Iraq / Syria and 'IS'. The statement issued by 126 Muslim scholars is helpful, but not readily available or accessible, until now.

Its language is theological and dense and Arabic words and phrases are used without explanation or translation. (A glossary prepared by my wife and checked by Imam Monawar Hussain is below.)

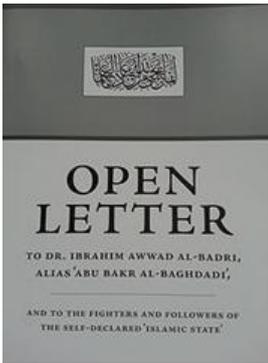
The safeguarding and the protection of young and vulnerable people from abuse and trafficking has been prominent in parts of the region, with new revelations of organised abuse by some immigrant men, and occasionally women, as well as by British men and women.

As SEEFF we need to encourage all faith communities to have acceptable and resilient Child Protection and Safeguarding Policies in place. We might think of doing this through education and arranging conferences, or by posting a sample policy document on the SEEFF website. Please let me know your thoughts on this subject.

I would like to thank Emel Soylu for her hard work on our website – I am very grateful to her.

Bede Gerrard, December 2014

OPEN LETTER TO LEADERS OF 'IS'



Signed by leading Sunni religious authorities from across the Islamic world to the leader and fighters of 'IS', the text is a closely reasoned and theological dissertation refuting the claims of the 'IS' to be representative and main stream Islam. Free copies are available (£2.95 p&p charge) –

info@theoxfordfoundation.org.uk

The document is an English translation and is suitable for use in schools or congregations who wish to study in depth the theology behind the debate going on in Sunni Islam to counter extremism and aims to prevent young people being indoctrinated with false ideas and to enable non-Muslims to follow the theological battle that is currently occurring.

Glossary of terms used in the *Open Letter to 'IS'*

<i>ahl al-hall wal- 'aqd al-hisbah</i>	those qualified to elect or dispose a caliph on behalf of the <i>Ummah</i> nation divinely sanctioned duty of the ruler to "command right and forbid wrong", in accordance with <i>Shari'ah</i> (Islamic law)
<i>al-kufr al-bawwah</i>	declared and candid disbelief
<i>al-Salaf al-Saleh</i>	'noble Companions and the imams of the Pious Forebears' – Salafi movement within Islam (<i>salaf</i> predecessors, ancestors), used to identify the earliest Muslims
<i>al-wahy</i>	revealed through revelation
<i>asbab al-nuzul</i>	reasons and circumstances for revelation
<i>da'wah</i>	invitation
<i>da'wah hasanah</i>	gentle invitation
<i>Dhimmis</i>	non-Muslim citizens of an Islamic state
<i>dhulm</i>	wickedness
<i>farḍ</i>	legal obligation
<i>farḍ ayn</i>	individual obligation
<i>farḍ kifayah</i>	communal obligation
<i>fatwas</i>	religious edicts
<i>fiqh al-naḥs</i>	having 'legal intuition'
<i>fiqh al-waq'i</i>	practical jurisprudence
<i>fitnah</i>	strife, sedition, discord
<i>fusuq</i>	evildoing
<i>Hadith</i>	report of the teachings, deeds and sayings of the Islamic prophet Muhammad
<i>hilf al-fudul</i>	pre-Islamic 'League of the Virtuous'
<i>hudud</i>	punishment – limit or restriction for the punishment of serious crime
<i>ijtihad</i>	independent reasoning
<i>istikhlaf'</i>	succession
<i>istikhlaf'</i>	not rulership but, rather, dwelling on their land
<i>Jahiliyyah</i>	ignorance of monotheism and divine law
<i>jihad</i>	struggle
<i>jizyah</i>	poll tax
<i>kafir</i>	disbeliever
<i>kufr</i>	disbelief
<i>mubiqat</i>	one of the most abominable sins
<i>Qiblah</i>	declaring the people of the <i>Qiblah</i> as non-Muslim is not permissible; direction that should be faced when a Muslim prays
<i>rak'ahs</i>	prostrations

<i>sadaqah</i>		charity
<i>Sahih</i>		Sahih Bukhari, one of the most authentic collections of the Islamic Sunnah
<i>Shari'ah</i>		Islamic Law
<i>shirk</i>		idolatry
<i>shura</i>		how can you not consult
<i>Sunnah</i>		the way Prophet Muhammad (saas) lived his life
<i>Surah</i>		chapter of the Qur'an
<i>Tā hā</i>		A particular sūrah of 135 verses
<i>takfir</i>		declaring people non-Muslim
<i>the Shafi'i school</i>		one of the schools of jurisprudence within the Sunni branch of Islam
<i>ummah</i>		nation, community
<i>usul</i>		fundamentals of jurisprudence
<i>yastakhlifakum</i>		make you successors
<i>zakat</i>		Alms which only Muslims pay and which is higher in percentage than the <i>jizyah</i>

2015 INTERFAITH CALENDAR AND INFORMATION

JANUARY

- 5 January MAHAYANA NEW YEAR** *Buddhist*
GURU GOBINDH SINGH BIRTHDAY *Sikh* Honouring the birth of the founder of the Khalsa who lived 1469-1539 CE
- 6 January EPIPHANY** *Christian* Commemoration of the manifestation of the divine nature of Jesus Christ. The homage of the magi to the infant Jesus is honoured
FEAST OF THE THEOPHANY *Orthodox Christian* Celebration of the Baptism of Jesus, at which time the Trinity was revealed to the world
- 7 January NATIVITY OF CHRIST** *Armenian Orthodox Christian* Feast of the Incarnation of Christ, celebrating on one day His birth, the homage of the magi and His Baptism
FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST *Orthodox Christian (some)* Celebrated by those Churches using the Julian Calendar (dates lag 13 days behind Gregorian (revised Julian) dates).
- 11 January BAPTISM OF CHRIST** *Western Christian* Celebrated on the first Sunday after 6 January
- 13 January MAGHI** *Sikh* Commemoration of a battle in which forty Sikhs died for Guru Gobindh Singh Ji
- 18 January WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY OPENS** *Christian*
WORLD RELIGION DAY *Baha'i* Begins sunset 17 January
- 19 January BAPTISM OF CHRIST** *Orthodox Christian (some)* Celebrated by Churches retaining the Julian Calendar
- 24 January VASANT PANCHAMI** *Hindu* Celebration dedicated to Saraswati, goddess of learning
- 25 January FEAST OF THE CONVERSION OF ST PAUL** *Christian* Close of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Paul was a persecutor of Christians who became a devoted follower of Christ
- 28 January ST THOMAS AQUINAS** *Christian* Teacher of the Church, patron saint of students and theologians.
- 30 January HOLY ECUMENICAL TEACHERS BASIL THE GREAT, GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN AND JOHN CHRYSOSTOM** *Orthodox Christian* Remembering three important

teachers and theologians of the Church; day of prayer for all involved in education, both teachers and students.

FEBRUARY

- 2 February CANDLEMAS** *Christian* Celebration of the child Jesus' presentation in the temple to the aged Simeon. New beginnings are recognized. Candles are lit. This Feast marks the end of the Christmas cycle of Feasts
- IMBOLC / LUGHNASSAD** *Wicca/Pagan* Northern and southern hemispheres - celebration of the lengthening of daylight as winter moves into spring (begins at sundown on 1 February)
- 3 February SETSUBUN-SAI** *Shinto* Celebration of the change of seasons with the coming of spring with shouts of 'Devils out, Good Fortune in'. Bean-throwing protects against demons
- 4 February TU BISHVAT** *Jewish* Celebration of the coming of spring by preparation of foods native to Israel. Also known as 'New Year for Trees' – a method for determining the age of trees for tithing purposes (begins at sunset on 3 February)
- 15 February NIRVANA DAY** *Buddhist, Jain* Regional observance of the death of the Buddha
- MEATFARE SUNDAY** *Orthodox Christian* Last day meat is eaten until Easter – during the next week all dairy products, eggs and fish are consumed in preparation for the Lenten fast
- 17 February SHROVE TUESDAY** *Christian* Dairy products are eaten in preparation for the Lenten fast. Christians would confess their sins before their observance of Lent
- 18 February ASH WEDNESDAY** *Christian* First day of Lent. Many commemorate this day by receiving a cross of ashes on their forehead. A day of fasting
- WORLD RELIGION DAY** *Baha'i*
- CHINESE NEW YEAR** *Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist*
- 22 February CHEESEFARE SUNDAY** *Orthodox Christian* Last eating of dairy products and eggs until Easter
- 23 February CLEAN MONDAY** *Orthodox Christian* Great Lent begins
- 26 February-1 March INTERCALARY DAYS** *Baha'i* Insertion of days into the calendar in order to maintain their solar calendar (begins at sunset on 25 February).

MARCH

- 1 March SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY** *Orthodox Christian* First Sunday of Great Lent – commemorates the restoration of the veneration of Icons after the Seventh Ecumenical Council 787
- ST DAVID OF WALES** *Christian* Saint known for his wisdom and missionary work. Known as the evangeliser of southern Wales
- 2-20 March NINETEEN-DAY FAST** *Baha'i* Observed by adults in good health; no food or drink from sunrise to sunset (begins at sunset on 1 March)
- 5 March PURIM** *Jewish* Celebration of the deliverance of the Jewish minority in Persia from genocide. Charity to the poor, sharing food with friends, vigorous merrymaking mark the observance (begins at sunset on 4 March)
- MAGHA PUJA DAY** *Buddhist* Celebration of the presentation of teachings by Lord Buddha to an assembly of holy men
- 6 March HOLI** *Hindu* Spring festival dedicated to the god of pleasure, observed in a colourful and boisterous manner: people shower each other with coloured water and smear red and green powder on each other
- HOLA MOHALLA** *Sikh* Day when mock battles are fought and martial arts are displayed
- 17 March Maha Shivaratri** *Hindu* Festival in honour of Lord Shiva and his marriage to Goddess Parvati. Ceremonies involving prayers and hymns take place mostly at night.
- 18 March L. RON HUBBARD BIRTHDAY** *Scientologist*

- 20 March EQUINOX / OSTARA** *Wicca/Pagan* Northern hemisphere. Celebration of the vernal equinox (begins at sunset on 19 March)
- 21 March NAW RUZ (NEW YEAR)** *Baha'i/Zoroastrian/Hindu* Day following the vernal Equinox; observed as the beginning of a new year in these faith traditions
- 21-28 March RAMAYANA*** *Hindu* Celebration of the birth of Lord Rama, hero of the religious epic poem, the *Ramayana*. The days involve the telling of stories and going to the temple
- 25 March ANNUNCIATION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY** *Christian* Commemoration of the visit of the Angel Gabriel to Mary to announce to her that she would bear a son who would be God. She would do so while remaining a virgin
- BIRTH OF PROPHET ZARATHUSHTRA** *Zoroastrian*
- 29 March PALM SUNDAY** *Christian* Holy Week begins. Celebration of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. It is observed with processions using palm branches

APRIL

- 2 April MAUNDY THURSDAY** *Christian* Commemoration, often associated with the ritual washing of people's feet, of the first Lord's Supper when Jesus blessed bread and wine and commanded His disciples to remember Him whenever they did this
- 3 April GOOD FRIDAY** *Christian* Remembrance of the crucifixion of Jesus, and related events
- MAHAVIR JAYANTI** *Jain* Festival honouring Lord Mahavira on the founder's birthday. Shrines are visited. Teachings are reviewed and reflected upon
- 4-11 April PESACH (PASSOVER)** *Jewish* Celebration of the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. The story of the Exodus is recounted, and the ongoing struggle of all peoples for freedom from internal and external tyranny is celebrated. A special meal is a central feature (begins at sunset on 3 April)
- 4 April THEREVADIN NEW YEAR** *Buddhist*
- HANUMAN JAYANTI** *Hindu* Celebration of Hanuman who was an embodiment of Lord Rama. Devotion and selfless work are encouraged
- LAZARUS SATURDAY** *Orthodox Christian* Celebration of the resurrection of Lazarus by Jesus, celebrated on the eve of Palm Sunday; revealing Jesus as 'the resurrection and life' of all mankind
- 5 April EASTER** *Christian* Remembrance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead after His crucifixion on Good Friday. (Orthodox Christians keep the Feast after Jews keep Passover.)
- PALM SUNDAY** *Orthodox Christian*
- 10 April HOLY FRIDAY** *Orthodox Christian*
- 12 April PASCHA (EASTER)** *Orthodox Christian* Remembrance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead after His crucifixion on Holy Friday
- 14 April BAISAKHI - NEW YEAR** *Sikh* Greetings that wish good life in coming days are exchanged. The day commemorates the founding of the Khalsa, a distinctive Sikh brotherhood
- 15 April LORD'S EVENING MEAL** *Jehovah's Witness* Jesus celebrated the Passover with his apostles, dismissed Judas Iscariot, and then instituted the Lord's Evening Meal. Like the Jewish Passover this is an annual celebration
- 16 April YOM HASHOAH / THE CATASTROPHE** *Jewish* Day established to remember the six million Jews killed by the Nazis in 1933-45. Observed by many non-Jews as well. The Day was introduced in 1953, one of only four official Days added to the Jewish calendar in 2,000 years – it is that important. The Jewish community's day for internal reflection, the opportunity to educate its own children to unite in passing on the torch of remembrance, to honour the victims of the Shoah and to recognise the achievements of its survivors and refugees who have given so much to society. (begins at sunset on 15 April)

- 21 April FIRST DAY OF RIDVAN** *Baha'i* Commemoration of the 12-day period in 1863 when Baha'u'llah declared that he was God's messenger for this age. Work is to be suspended on days 1, 9, and 12 of the festival (begins at sunset on 20 April)
- 23 April ST GEORGE'S DAY** *Christian* Commemoration of the Martyr George in Asia Minor. Devotion to him was brought to England by returning Crusaders; he became the saint protector of England
- 24 April YOM HA'ATZMAUT** *Jewish* Israel's national day, commemorates the Declaration of Independence in 1948. Celebrated on the 5th day of the month Iyar (Hebrew calendar), or on a preceding or following day, depending on day of the week of this date. Yom Ha'atzmaut is preceded by Yom Hazikaron, the Israeli Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terrorism Remembrance Day
- 29 April NINTH DAY OF RIDVAN** *Baha'i* (begins at sunset on 28 April)
- * The *Ramayana* belongs to a class of literature known in Sanskrit as *kavya* (poetry), in the West to the category of literature familiar to readers of Homer, the epic. With the *Mahabharata*, it is one of two epics with a decisive influence in shaping the nature of Indian civilization. The *Ramayana* existed in the oral tradition c 1,500 BCE, but 4th-century BCE is generally accepted as the date of its composition in Sanskrit by Valmiki. Some seek to date the *Ramayana* back to at least 6,000 years, but the historicity of the *Ramayana* is perhaps the least interesting of the questions that can be raised about it and its characters. Whether its hero Rama (in Hindu mythology an avatar of Vishnu but a principal deity in his own right, also worshipped in parts of north India as a king), exist or not is perhaps of little importance. Or whether he is to be viewed merely as a trope, a sign of patriarchy, or an insignia of valiant and militant kshatriyahood (which is how the present generation of militant Hindutvavadis see him).

COMING EVENTS

ANNUAL FRIENDSHIP WALK OF FAITHS – 11 June, Oxford

Leaves Richmond Road Jewish Centre, 6.00 pm; arrives at the Central Mosque by 8.00 pm
Organised by Oxford Council of Faiths

MORE DETAILS IN THE NEXT SEFF NEWSLETTER!

THE SEEFF AGM WILL BE DISCUSSED at its 20 January Board Meeting

Details will be circulated as soon as they are available.

NEXT ISSUE – MID-APRIL 2015

Events or reports you would like included – please send them to me **before 16 March**.

Short explanation of a festival – I am happy to be sent these.

For reasons of space or balance articles may be edited. If you would like to see an edited version of what you send, please let me know.

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