



GREETINGS TO YOU ALL!

As I begin to write this in early June my thoughts turn to death and how people of different faith traditions accept this fact of life. They turn to death because here in Oxfordshire two members of the local faith community have died on successive days. The first was, Mr Abdul Aziz, chairman of the Oxford Central Mosque, local restaurant owner, philanthropist to the Muslim and other faith communities and causes. The second was the Revd Peter Ball, County Ecumenical Development Officer for Oxfordshire and priest in the Anglican Diocese of Oxford. Both were workers for harmony within faith communities, and across religious divides. Then came the atrocities in Orlando; a young man beset with personal problems and seemingly motivated by religious extremism attacking men and women, their and his lifestyles apparently contrary to his perception of morality. Then the sudden death of a child, attacked by an alligator dragging him into the sea.

And what are we to make of death? As people of faith we ought to rejoice when the person who has died has been felt to have lived out their faith to the best of their ability. But our own loss and grief at losing a loved one can be overwhelming. While grief, a strong emotion, can lead us to act irrationally at times, yet it can also be an experience bringing us closer to the roots of our faith.

The funeral prayers on the day following Abdul Aziz's death, were held immediately following the midday prayers in a crowded mosque. The final act before saying a final farewell to his body was all the men lining up across the width of the prayer room and saying three times 'God is Great' each time advancing nearer to the place of his coffin. Yes: in the death of a loved one we can all say 'God is Great' repeating in our hearts 'God is Merciful', and trusting in this mercy go to say our farewell to the person who has departed this life.

The open coffin was then placed outside the east door of the prayer chamber, with a coloured umbrella sheltering Mr Aziz from the rain and the sun (both happening during the funeral), as each mourner stood quietly at his head before sharing with the family the passing of a good man.

While Peter's well-attended Memorial was held in Witney's Methodist church where he had his office, the funerals and passing services for those killed in Orlando were beginning to happen, each according to the belief of the departed person's family. Some would have religious services, others' lives were remembered without reference to God or any spiritual reality. Any family needs to mark a loved one's passing in their own way, but for relatives, friends and colleagues without faith, or belief in an afterlife or re-incarnation, the sudden chasm in life can seem particularly bleak.

Among these reminders of mortality I also celebrated the 90th birthday of our Queen. Across the SE region there were services of thanksgiving, parties and other community events. The service in Christ Church Cathedral included prayers from Muslim, Jewish Hindu and Sikh participants with members of other faiths in the packed congregation. For me what came through in the service was that I was aware of the constant reaffirmation of the Queen as a person of strong personal belief in God.

I write as the examination season has passed, and for many the summer is beginning a time for rest, relaxation and recharging of our emotional and physical energies before a return to work or the start of a new phase of our life. May you all have a relaxing summer.

But as I prepare to send out this newsletter, death and destruction intrude again, an attack by 'puritans' on the Prophet's mosque in Medina, one of the holiest places for devout Muslims.

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“Living with Difference - community, diversity, and the common good” - a conference on the Butler-Sloss report

Religion & Belief in British Public Life

SEEFF Day Conference
Thursday, 1st September 2016

Christ Church Cathedral Oxford

Speakers for the day:

Very Revd Martyn Percy,
Dean of Christ Church

Imam Ibrahim Mogra
Assistant Secretary, Muslim Council of Britain

Fakhera Rehman
Kirklees Faiths Forum

Woolf Institute
Woolf Institute Scholar

Rabbi Norman Solomon
Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish studies

Jeremy Rodell
British Humanist Association

Thursday 1 September
9.30 a.m. for 10.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m.

Includes SEEFF AGM with reports from sub-regions of SE England (Guided tour of the Cathedral for up to 25 people)

Registration fee £12 to cover the cost of lunch and refreshments

To book your place: Please send cheque to:
Bede Gerrard, 20 Diamond Court, 153 Banbury Road OX2 7AA

Or: Pay by bank transfer to SEEFF sorting code: 08-60-01 account number: 20306289 Email: seeffchair@gmail.com if you have paid by bank transfer



South East England Faiths Forum

Reg. Ch. No. 1139258

REPORTS OF EVENTS FROM AROUND THE SOUTH EAST

WALKING IN FRIENDSHIP AND MUTUAL RESPECT STRONGER TOGETHER THAN APART



Up to 500 members of Oxford's faith communities came together on Thursday 2 June to take part in the annual Interfaith Friendship Walk, and celebrate the cultural and religious richness of the city. This year the theme for the Walk was 'World Peace'.

Organised through the Oxford Council of Faiths, the annual Friendship Walk has become a seminal event in the life of Oxford and gives an opportunity to meet people of differing faiths and to establish friendship and a sense of community across the City. The Walk provides a focus for cementing ties between religious groups and ensuring mutual support, respect and understanding across the wide range of faith communities.

At the end of last year the Oxford Council of Faiths was delighted to receive the High Sheriff's Community Integration Award, given to support the continuation of the Friendship Walk because of its contribution to interfaith and inter-communal harmony and respect.

Although a leaflet published by Churches Together in England, *Sharing our Spiritual Treasures*, is aimed at Christians, and is a call to look at the treasures of the different Church traditions, and through them to experience a deeper appreciation of our own faith. I would extend this thought, and say that through looking at the treasures of other religions, other faith communities, each of us can inform and deepen our own faith.

Carrying brightly coloured balloons, walkers and riders in rickshaws left the Oxford Synagogue and Jewish Centre in Richmond Road in the early evening. They made their way through the city halting at St Giles Church, and the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Radcliffe Square.

We walk about three miles with balloons and banners carried by members of the city's different religious traditions and by civil authority representatives. From the synagogue, open to all with members of the Jewish community welcoming us, ready to talk about their building and the treasures it holds, our route takes us to the large mosque. There, members of its community welcomed us, ready to answer questions about how they use it for the prayers they hold five times each day - in itself a treasure.



At each of those places, and at the churches where we stop *en route*, there are welcomes to the Walk, and reflections from a member of one of the many different faith communities which make up Oxford Council of Faiths, the organiser of the Walk. And at our journey's end, about two hours after we began, the mosque provides a free meal of delicious vegetarian food, with the Jewish community providing us with specially prepared desserts.

But it is the Walk itself which makes our journey important. For there is time and opportunity to meet others from different faiths than ours, to find out about their beliefs, to have our sometimes misguided ideas of them corrected, to be surprised at what hold in common, to argue peaceably about the things which we don't. And our Walk is also just that: a witness to others as we walk along with our brightly coloured balloons, a witness that those from so many different faiths can be at peace, find it important to be together, and want to be.

We talk with our Jewish companions about the Scriptures and what they tell us about the oneness of God; with Hindus about the many avatars of the Supreme Being, God, and reflect on the complexity and transcendence of God and yet the intimacy we can have with Him; with Muslims about the emphasis on modesty of the person



which can bring us to discover the image and likeness of God in everyone we meet; with Buddhists about waiting in silence; and with Baha'is and Sikhs about the hospitality of God.

We walk following one of the tenets of OxCoF itself: the need to be steadfast in our own faith, while respecting the beliefs and faith of our neighbour, and being ready to welcome every opportunity to learn from the diverse society that Britain is today, and which has such a profound influence on how we ourselves live.

This year a collection taken at the Walk enabled OxCoF to give Host Oxford £600 to provide emergency accommodation for asylum seekers in our city.

The Friendship Walk is supported by the Oxford Council of Faiths, The Central Oxford Mosque, Oxford Jewish Congregation, St Giles' Church, The Madina Mosque, Oxford Hindu Temple and Community Centre Project, University Church of Mary the Virgin, The Society of Friends, Wesley Memorial Church, The Asian Cultural Centre, Minuteman Press and others.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

A FAMILY PICNIC IN HUGHENDEN PARK

Sunday 17 July, 12.30pm through to teatime

We would like dry warm weather (or warmish, at least)...

If the weather looks iffy, we will decide at 10.00am on the day.

Please phone Anne 07799-373 421 or Abid 07792 883 736 for the decision.

Where Near the children's playground adjacent to Coates Lane HP13 5ET

Park in Coates Lane, High Wycombe HP13 5ET

Bring a picnic to share. **Bring** what you need to sit on, blankets or chairs

Bring your favourite outdoor game to share

Organised by Wycombe Sharing of Faiths

"UNDERSTANDING ISLAM" - FAITH & HARMONY

Sunday 17 July, 4.00pm, Aisha Masjid & Islamic Centre London Road

Earley, Reading, RG6 1BW (07877-670 765

Details Ashwani Gupta (WBC) 07528-195 503; ashwani.gupta@wokingham.gov.uk

Shakeel Khan 07568-189 072; 07545-582 111

Refreshments will be provided

Wokingham Borough Interfaith Network in partnership with Aisha Masjid & Islamic Centre

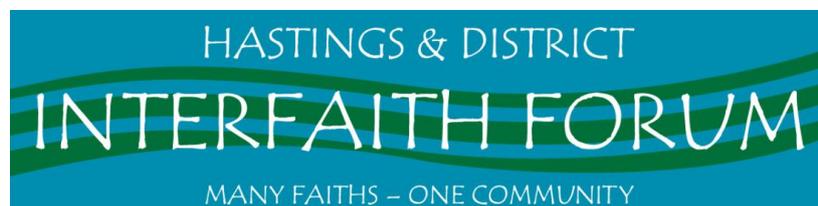
THE INTERFAITH CONTACT GROUP OF BRIGHTON AND HOVE SUMMER CONCERT

Sunday 17 July, 6.00- 8.00pm, Hove Methodist Church

The evening will include a beautiful and diverse variety of music plus a superb raffle and refreshments. We hope to raise funds for

The Integration Foundation of Ghana & The Interfaith Contact Group of Brighton and Hove

Please join us, along with the Mayor of Brighton and Hove, and have a great evening out



Sunday 7 August, 1.30-5.00pm, St Leonards Gardens, Maze Hill

A Garden Full of Cultural Delights Summer garden party and celebration of our diverse local faiths and cultures

Tuesday 6 September, 6.30-9.00pm, Friends Meeting House, Hastings (with Hastings against War).

Maya Evans experiences in Afghanistan working with Muslim peacemakers in Kabul and in Okinawa, with Buddhist monks and Catholic nuns, helping to protect the island from environmental damage re the construction of a controversial American naval base.

Saturday 29 October, 2.30-5.00pm, The Magnet Centre, Christ Church Courtyard, London Road, St Leonards-on-Sea TN37 6GL (TBC) *Special Guest Speaker TBA*

Sunday 20 November, 3.00-5.30pm, Sussex Coast College

Hastings Youth Awards 2016 – celebrating Youth and Culture

WOKING PEOPLE OF FAITH PROGRAMME FOR 2016

21 August, WPoF 6-a-side Football Tournament

24 September WPoF Annual International Day of Peace event.

October date TBC Doing God Together

15-22 November National Interfaith Week of mixed WPoF of events

December date TBC A 'conversation with'

Details Garry Shore coordinator@wpof.org.uk; www.wpof.org.uk

WOKING DEBATES 2016

Details Keith Scott 01483-824 980; keithsc_2000@yahoo.com; www.wokingdebates.com

Organised by Woking Action for Peace, Churches Together in Woking, Friends of the Earth, Woking LA21, Woking Quakers, Surrey Faith Links, Transition Towns and Woking People of Faith.

BUILDING GOOD RELATIONS WITH PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT FAITHS AND BELIEFS

In Britain today, people of many different faiths and beliefs live side by side. The opportunity lies before us to work together to build a society rooted in the values we treasure. But this society can only be built on a sure foundation of mutual respect, openness and trust. This means finding ways to live our lives of faith with integrity, and allowing others to do so too. Our different religious traditions offer us many resources for this and teach us the importance of good relationships characterised by honesty, compassion and generosity of spirit.

The Inter Faith Network offers the following code of conduct for encouraging and strengthening these relationships. As members of the human family, we should show each other respect and courtesy. In our dealings with people of other faiths and beliefs, this means exercising good will and:

Respecting other people's freedom within the law to express their beliefs and convictions; Learning to understand what others actually believe and value, and letting them express this in their own terms; Respecting the convictions of others about food, dress and social etiquette and not behaving in ways which cause needless offence; Recognising that all of us at times fall short of the ideals of our own traditions and never comparing our own ideals with other people's practices; Working to prevent disagreement from leading to conflict; Always seeking to avoid violence in our relationships;

When we talk about matters of faith with one another, we need to do so with sensitivity, honesty and straightforwardness. This means:

Recognising that listening as well as speaking is necessary for a genuine conversation; Being honest about our beliefs and religious allegiances; Not misrepresenting or disparaging other people's beliefs and practices; Correcting misunderstanding or misrepresentations not only of our own but also of other faiths whenever we come across them; Being straightforward about our intentions; Accepting that in formal inter faith meetings there is a particular responsibility to ensure that the religious commitment of all those who are present will be respected

All of us want others to understand and respect our views. Some people will also want to persuade others to join their faith. In a multi faith society where this is permitted, the attempt should always be characterised by self-restraint and a concern for the other's freedom and dignity. This means:

Respecting another person's expressed wish to be left alone; Avoiding imposing ourselves and our views on individuals or communities who are in vulnerable situations in ways which exploit these; Being sensitive and courteous; Avoiding violent action or language, threats, manipulation, improper inducements, or the misuse of any kind of power; Respecting the right of others to disagree with us

Living and working together is not always easy. Religion harnesses profound feelings in the hearts of those who believe.

2016 INTERFAITH CALENDAR AND INFORMATION

For some Orthodox Christians dates are observed on the Julian calendar (the 'Old' calendar) which is currently 13 days later than Gregorian / civil calendar – the feasts dependent upon Easter are kept by all Orthodox Christians on the same days. Some faith traditions begin the day at sunset, so festivals begin a day earlier than the date might suggest. Dates that depend on a lunar calendar will change from year to year on the civil calendar. Within the same faith tradition a local date may be observed for some celebrations. The Islamic calendar means that dates advance approximately ten days each civil year.

AUGUST

- 1 Aug. LAMMAS** *Christian* First fruits celebration observed by placing bread baked from first harvest on the altar.
- LUGHNASADH / IMBOLC** *Wicca / Neo Pagan* Observance of the first harvest of the year involving agricultural festivals and prosperity magic.
- DORMITION FAST BEGINS** *Orthodox Christian* Fast in preparation for 15 August.
- 5 Aug. GANESH CHATURTHI** *Hindu* A festival honouring the god of prosperity, prudence and success. Images of Ganesha are venerated.
- 6 Aug. TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD** *Christian* Commemoration of the experience on Mt Tabor when Jesus' physical appearance became bright as He appeared with Moses and Elijah.
- 14 Aug. TISH'A B'AV** *Jewish* A day of fasting in remembrance of the destructions of the Temple in 586 BC and 70 AD.
- 15 Aug. ASSUMPTION OF BLESSED VIRGIN MARY** *Catholic Christian*
- DORMITION OF THE THEOTOKOS** *Orthodox Christian* Day celebrating the end of the earthly life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In Catholic belief her body and soul were taken together into heaven; other Christians honour the death of Christ's mother but make no call on adherents to hold beliefs about the manner of her heavenly birthday.
- 18 Aug. RAKSHA BANDHAN** *Hindu* Festival honouring the loving ties between brothers and sister in a family.
- 25 Aug. KRISHNA JANMASHTAMI** *Hindu* Commemoration of the birth of Krishna, the 8th incarnation of god Vishnu who took the form of Krishna to destroy the evil king Kansa.
- 29 Aug. BEHEADING OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST** *Christian* Day that commemorates the beheading of John by king Herod at the request of his step-daughter Salome. Observed as a strict fast in Orthodox Christian calendars.

SEPTEMBER

- 1 Sept. ECCLESIASTICAL YEAR BEGINS** *Orthodox Christian* First day of the Church year, observed as a day of prayer for the natural environment and the care that ought to be shown to all creation.
- 6-15 Sept. PARYUSHANA PARAVA** *Jain* 8-day festival signifying human emergence into a new world of spiritual and moral refinement. Marked by recitations from Jain sacred writing and family exchange of cards and letters. Celebration of the natural qualities of the soul. The 8th day (*Samvatsari*) is most important and is focused on forgiveness.
- 8 Sept. NATIVITY OF VIRGIN MARY** *Christian* Commemoration of the birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary, presenting her holiness to the faithful but acknowledging the normality of her birth and life.
- 10 Sept. WAQF AL ARAFA / HAJJ DAY** *Islam* Observance day during Hajj when pilgrims pray for forgiveness and mercy.
- 11-14 Sept. EID AL ADHA** *Islam* Festival of Sacrifice. The day after Arafat, the most important day in Hajj ritual. A three-day festival recalling Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son in obedience to Allah.
- 14 Sept. ELEVATION OF THE LIFE GIVING CROSS / HOLY CROSS** *Christian* Commemoration of the finding by the Empress Helena of the Cross on which Jesus Christ died. Observed as a strict fast day by *Orthodox Christians*. Those churches following the *Old calendar* will keep this day on 27 September.
- 22 Sept. EQUINOX / MABON** *Wicca / Pagan* Northern hemisphere observance of the autumnal equinox when day and night are of equal length. A harvest festival time.
- 29 Sept. ST MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS** *Christian* Commemoration of the holy, spiritual, heavenly beings created to glorify and serve God. This feast recalls the dedication of the Church of St Michael and all Angels at Mount Gargano in Apulia. *Orthodox Christians* celebrate this feast on 8 November.

OCTOBER

- 1-10 Oct. NAVARATRI** - *Hindu* Festival of the divine mother honouring Durga, wife of Shiva, and time for seeking her blessings. Also observed as a celebration recalling the days of Lord Krishna.
- 2 Oct. MUHARRAM / NEW YEAR** *Islam*
- 3-4 Oct., Sundown to Sundown ROSH HASHANAH** *Jewish* New Year. A time of prayer, abstinence, self-examination and penitence. The story of Abraham is read, the ram's horn is sounded, and special foods are prepared and shared.
- 4 Oct. ST FRANCIS DAY** *Christian* Francis was the headstrong son of a rich family from Assisi who after a period of remorse for his former way of life founded the order which now bears his name. He died in 1226. He is remembered particularly for his love of the natural world.

- 11 Oct. DASARA** *Hindu* Celebration of victory and valour. Lord Rama is remembered as winning a victory over evil.
- 12 Oct. ASHURA** *Islam (Shi'ite)* Holy day - 10th of the Islamic month, Muharram. Shi'ite Muslims: major commemoration, marking the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson, Hussein
- YOM KIPPUR / DAY OF ATONEMENT** *Jewish* Holiest day of the year, observed with strict fasting and ceremonial repentance.
- 17-23 Oct. SUKKOT / FEAST OF TABERNACLES** *Jewish* Celebrates the harvest and the protection of the people of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness, dwelling in tents. Temporary 'booths' have leaves for a roof so the sky can be seen. In temperate climates, the night is spent in the Succoth.
- 18 Oct. ST LUKE, APOSTLE & EVANGELIST** *Christian* Writer of the third of the four Gospels.
- 20 Oct. BIRTH OF THE BĀB** *Baha'i* Honouring of the founder of the Babi religion, forerunner to Baha'u'llah and the Baha'i faith.
- INSTALLATION OF SCRIPTURES AS GURU GRANTH** *Sikh* Remembrance of the eternal installation of the holy books, Granth Sahib.
- 24 Oct. SHEMINI ATZERET** *Jewish* Completion of the annual cycle of reading of the Torah.
- 25 Oct. SIMCHAT TORAH** *Jewish* Day to celebrate the reading of the Law. Synagogue services involve readings, processions and blessing of the children.
- 30 Oct. DIWALI / DEEPAVALI / FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS** *Hindu - Sikh - Jain* Celebrated to honour Ramachandra, incarnation of the god Vishnu. On this day Rama returned to his people after 14 years of exile during which he fought and won a battle against the demons. People lit their houses to celebrate his victory over evil (light over darkness).
- 31 Oct. ALL HALLOWS EVE / HALLOWE'EN** *Christian* Day on which all saints, known and unknown, are remembered. A call to all Christians to remember they are all meant to be saints.
- NEW YEAR** *Jain* First day of the Jain new year.
- SAMHAIN** ('sow'inn') *Pagan* Marks the Feast of the Dead. Many Pagans also celebrate it as the old Celtic New Year. Some mark this at Imbolc.

NEXT ISSUE - MID-OCTOBER 2016

Events or reports you would like included - please send them to me **before 29 SEPTEMBER**.

Short explanations 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 your article before it is published please let me know.

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**South East England Faiths Forum (SEEFF)
Reg. Ch. No. 1139258**