

Elmbridge Multi-faith Forum

Winter 2008 (Newsletter Number 11)



Since our last Newsletter we have:-

- Published and circulated 1,000 printed copies of our Spring 2008 Newsletter and added it to our website.
- Put in place arrangements whereby we can reclaim Gift Aid on taxpayers' subscriptions and donations made since 10th July, 2007
- Joined our Ahmadiyya friends at their Peace Symposium in March and their international summer meeting
- Played an active role in the revival of the South East England Faith Forum on 7th April and been elected to the Interfaith Network.
- Held, on 10th April, the first workshop of the Walton St. John's Community Project.
- Visited the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes on 12th June.
- Visited the Jain Temple on 1st July.
- Held our fourth Annual General Meeting on 16th July
- Held our 4th Annual Gala on Saturday 18th October.
- Been granted £4000 for the current year by the Surrey Community Foundation and applied for a grant for 2009 to 2011 from the new 'Faiths in Action' initiative.

Membership

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

We now have over 100 members.

For enquiries about membership, please contact the Membership Secretary:

Phyllis Woodhead
01372 468783



Newsletters

The printing of our Newsletters has proved a great success. People have found them attractive to take away and keep. They have been used by local schools, and are read nationally (a Member of EMF from Sutton Coldfield uses the articles

as a basis for a Church discussion group) and internationally (Finland, France, Germany, Kosova, Morocco, Russia and Egypt). Several new Memberships have been a direct result of picking up a Newsletter in the Civic Centre or a library.

However, they cost money, and, though Elmbridge have provided funding for 1 Newsletter in the year, 2008-9, we were not sure whether we could afford more of the same quality – hence the delay in producing the present copy.

However, a grant application that got lost in the pipeline has now emerged, and we shall be able to revert to our normal practice of providing Newsletters every four months.



The South-East England Faith Forum (SEEFF)

This has now been revived. Nabil was on the Organising Committee for a conference at Surrey University on 7th April, and Geoff facilitated one of the Discussion Groups. The Government will explain its new Faith Strategy at a meeting on 26th November.



Walton Community Project

In our last Newsletter, we explained that Elmbridge Council and the police had asked for our help in improving Community relations in

the St. John's area of Walton. The problem was one of tension between groups of teenagers and the older residents of the estate. The teenagers were gathering on the streets and using the Community Centre. The older people were, however, avoiding the Community Centre so as not to mix with the youth.

The EMF Executive Committee decided that a programme to resolve this problem was an appropriate use of money that we had been given to promote 'integration and cohesion'. It was an opportunity to show that faiths could work together.

On April 10th we managed to persuade a mixed age group to meet in the Community Centre to produce a DVD recording, in which individuals expressed their views on relations on the estate. The activity was facilitated by 'Love of Learning'. Members of EMF provided refreshments. After some reticence, participation warmed.

The resultant film, lasting about twenty minutes, was subsequently shown to the participants and a few others from the Community. This generated further dialogue between the young and the older, and it was agreed to show the DVD to the public. Showings were interspersed with discussions about how to ease tensions. One result has been a 'Stop the Boredom' campaign with awards to those young people who perform a number of community service activities, such as weeding the garden of an older resident.

On the 20th June a presentation was made to the public in a series of viewings, allowing anyone who

attended on a 'drop in' basis to view the DVD and discuss the project. More than 100 people attended including councillors, the Police, the Fire Service and the Church.

We hope to continue to help the residents of St. John's and are in discussions with the Council and residents about the next phase.



**REPORT ON EMF VISIT TO THE
LADY OF LOURDES CHURCH
Hampton Court Way, Thames
Ditton: 12 June 2008**



Attendance: The number of attendants expected was about 18. The number who eventually attended was 36, a very good turn out. We were welcomed warmly by Fr. Rob Esdaile, the Parish Priest, an extremely affable and eloquent person. Snacks and drinks were offered and Fr. Rob started the evening with a few moments of silent meditation and followed that by describing the church and the essential tenets of Roman Catholicism (RC).

Fr. Rob Esdaile:

RC was persecuted in the UK after the Reformation and this led to a 'ghetto mentality'. Gradually the community became more confident in the twentieth century, After the Second Vatican Council (1962-5), the vernacular became the normal language of worship in the RC churches and greater emphasis was put on the prayer of the whole community (not just the action of the priest) in worship.

RC believes in the one Creator God, understood as a "Trinity" (Father, Son and Spirit) because of the experience of Jesus Christ as Risen from the Dead. Christ was more than a "Rabbi", and RC emphasises the continuity from Christ through the Apostles down to the present. There is also an essential continuity with Judaism (from which it inherits the Hebrew Scriptures, now viewed as 'The Old Testament' – alongside the Gospels and letters of the 'New Testament'.

In the 4th Century AD it was agreed (in context of a dispute) that Christians should recognize the baptism even of those not in 'full communion' with the Church – which offers some limits to Christian disunity. The "Pope" ('Papa' in Italian – an affectionate term) or "Holy Father" is the symbol of the visible unity of the Church and is in direct succession to St Peter, the Apostle. He is also the leader of the "College of Bishops". Priests and Bishops get their power from the ordination process through that line of 'apostolic succession' and there is great emphasis on "Continuity" in RC.

The most important expression of continuity is the “Eucharist” and the “Communion”. Thus, the sharing of bread and wine is accompanied by the dropping of crumbs of bread into the chalice as a sign of communion and continuity. Celebration of forgiveness in “Confession” (more properly, the ‘Sacrament of Reconciliation’) is understood as bringing healing to the community damaged by sin. Use of this sacrament has fallen away in recent years, however.

In terms of morality, while RC inherits the “Ten Commandments” and the rest of Jewish Law, it is helped in reflecting on ethical issues in the contemporary secular world by emphasis on the “Natural Law” (seen as God’s will embedded in Creation): the boundaries of God’s action and love are not seen as coinciding with the limits of the Church. There is probably a greater respect for other Faiths than is possible in some other Christian denominations (since the Holy Spirit is seen as able to work in all people).

RC claims a teaching authority which is seen as guided (within limits) by the Holy Spirit. The Pope’s “Infallibility”, defined in 1870, has actually been invoked only once since then, in 1950, and it was in relation to the status of the “Virgin Mary”.

The Church: The Lady of Lourdes Church is a modern building, very suitably sited on the main road to Hampton Court. The inside is roomy, well lit, and not cluttered. Worshippers will find a small bowl of water at the entrance, and wetting one’s finger is a referral to the baptism. The (larger) Baptism bowl (‘font’) is also seen at the

entrance. Baptism is represented by St. Paul in terms of “death by drowning” and then the “resurrection”.

Apart from the altar and pulpit in the rather bare church, there were two glass panels with exquisite etching, staining and carving. The “hidden” symbols were described by Fr Rob, and, interestingly, some of the parishioners attending had not known the details. On one panel (probably intended to represent the martyrs of the Reformation) there was the signs of the “Mitre”, the “Cross”, the “daggers”, the “Noose”, the “Gallows”, the “Palm”, and the two (Greek) letters referring to Christ “Chi-Rho”, written X-P). On the second panel (dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus), there was the shape of Mary holding baby Jesus, with flowing water (recalling Lourdes, where Mary was seen in a vision by Bernadette in 1858), and a foot crushing the head of a serpent (representing the conquering of Sin through Mary’s Son). There was also the “Star of David” and a mystical “Rose”.

In Conclusion: The visit was enjoyable, informative, gratifying, energizing and a testimony to Fr. Esdaile’s ability to communicate and educate within a spirit of love and fellowship. We were all grateful



for having attended.
There obviously is so much more to RC, but space in our newsletter is limited.

Nabil M Mustapha



REPORT

Visit to Shikharbandhi Jain

Deraser (Temple), 1st July 2008



Introduction: The Temple is sited on a serene idyllic, quintessentially “English” setting in the heart of “Herts”. It is founded by the “Oshwal Association of the UK”. The plans were worked out in 1998 and the construction was completed in 2000. It is the only Jain purpose built temple in the whole of Europe. As the planning permission was conditional on the temple being overall not higher than the mansion that is part of the original site, the land had to be dug out to reduce the base and therefore the overall edifice height. The temple is exquisitely ornate in its design and there is an elevation, a “mountain” composed of small edifices, symbolic of many temples forged into one. The overall shape

of the building site is in the form of a “Human “body, the central part showing the original “Swastika” sign with the sides pointed in the opposite direction to that of the Nazi swastika. In Jain belief, the former brings good luck while the latter brings bad luck! In the “head” area there are 3 dots, indicating “**Right Faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct**”. This is the way for “**Salvation**” (within the three aspects of life, Hell, Heaven & Earth). At the very top above the 3 dots area, there is a single dot indicating the “Crescent of the Moon” and thus the resting place of the liberated souls.

The “Swastika” also symbolises our cycles of birth and death within 4 possible destinies: “**Heavenly Beings, Human Beings, Animal Beings (and these include birds, bugs and plants) and Hellish Being**”.

The Temple is guarded by a lion on one side, symbolising strength and courage, and an elephant on the other side, symbolising vegetarianism and ability to carry and labour.

In the “leg” area of the overall shape, there is a “Palm” with a wheel containing 24 inscriptions symbolic of the 24 beings and aspects of life, the **Tirthankars**”. The **palm** itself symbolises “**assurance**”, and the “**wheel**” indicates “**non-violence**”.

The whole figure indicating the Human also represents the Jain description of the “**Universe**”.

The “**Cupola**” of the temple is shaped like the **Lotus**, a flower characterised by its beauty, purity and purifying powers, and the fact that it grows on mud.



Jain Teachings:

We were met by Priest Vijay M Khetia, and his first words were that Jain is a religion of **“self discipline, and renouncing the material world”** The symbolism for this renunciation is a pot of sandal wood, as this is colourless and coolant, and thus liberating.

In Jain belief there is no “creator of the universe”, no “destroyer”, and therefore no beginning and no end. There is no supreme being, no “god”. The soul remains in a state of “nirvana”

They feel connected to Hinduism, and to Buddhism which preceded Jain by 100 years. In a similar way to the “Buddha”, the founder of the Jain Faith, the **”24th. Tirthankar”** was born to 599 BC to a king and queen, and was heir to the throne. However, at the age of 28 he wished to renounce the world, but was persuaded by his brother to postpone that decision. He did and at the age of 30, he fulfilled his desire, left the palace and roamed the region teaching renunciation, liberation and permanent Nirvana. His teachings included non-violence, truth, non-stealing, right conduct and non-possession. He advocated against discrimination on grounds of caste, creed or faith, and He taught the duty of protecting all living creatures. He had a single cloth garment on, and relied on food and drink given to

Him by anyone, provided the food was purposely done as an offering for him. He would never ask for food or drink. At the age of seventy two, in 527 BC, He (Mahavir) left his human body and “attained Nirvana” at Pavapuran the state of Bihar in India.

Jain’s do not eat or knowingly cause any harm to any living thing. Thus, they are not only strictly vegetarian, but they even eat only the product of the plant, not the root. They do not eat tubers (potatoes, carrots, etc), but only the products over ground, that is fruit and vegetables. They consider life as belonging to 5 categories, and all have to be preserved:

- 1- Human:** (4 limbs and upright). These are the highest category and thus non-violence is paramount.
- 2- Animal** (4 limbs but not upright) Animals have to be protected, and their milk is accepted for humans inasmuch as it does no harm to the animal to be milked.
- 3- Vegetable:** As mentioned, those grown above ground can be consumed, but not tubers or roots.
- 4- Insects:** (crawling). These have to be protected. Strictly speaking, Jains should not conduct any waking activity after dark or before dawn for fear of stepping on, or causing other harm, to insects.
- 5- Bacteria and other microscopic creatures:** (These have no legs and no animation as the categories above. They are the lowest of the creation): To protect these, Jain’s put on masks to avoid inhaling and

therefore possibly harming them.

To Summarise: The way of “**A-H-I-N-S-A**” encapsulates the teachings:

- A- Stands for Awareness:** To see our own self in the mirror of “Conscience and consciousness”
- H- Stands for Harmony:** “I will be a harmonious presence on this world and will cause no harm”
- I- Stands for Integration:** Integrate everything, body, mind and soul. Let us bring equanimity, equality and consideration to races, all religions, all ethnic groups, and all life.
- N- Stands for Nobility:** To remind us of the magnanimous quality of our souls, and to generate the feeling of generosity and compassion to all living creatures, in thought, word and deed.
- S- Stands for Service:** Serve somebody. Let your life be a service. Through service we become alive.
- A- Stands for Abstinence:** Abstinence from polluting ourselves with vile food, drink (as in alcohol) and anything that causes pain or suffering.

In Conclusion:



What our group we saw, heard and read was not only interesting, but provided great food for thought. We were reminded of the “**Kalasha**”, the top of the cupola of the temple, as it symbolises “**man’s eternal quest**” for “**immortality**”. It is not held on top by cement but rather by an embedded pipe going all through its structure. Flying defiantly above it is the “**Sacred flag or dhaja**” which symbolises the “**victory of good over evil**”. Perhaps this, as well as the strong message of non-violence, would be the message we can all take with us from the visit.

Nabil M Mustapha



**ELMBRIDGE MULTI-FAITH
FORUM
4th. ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING - 16 July 2008
Elmbridge Council Chamber at
7.00pm**

Unfortunately this year’s AGM coincided with a Council ‘Away Day’ and a holiday period. Nevertheless, eighteen members attended.

Mr. Stan Cowan, Mrs. Phyllis Cowan, Mrs Rushna Masters and Mr Nazir Malik were elected to the Executive Committee.

Copies of the minutes may be obtained from the Secretary. Most of the items are mentioned in this Newsletter in updated form.



Fifth Annual Gala 18th October
The Grenfell Centre,
Claremont Fancourt School,
Esher

This family event was again attended by over 200 people, who enjoyed a varied programme of multicultural entertainment and a cornucopia of foods of Jewish, Thai, Indian, Arabic and English origin. Much of this food was given by our members.

We were honoured by the presence of the Mayor and Mayoress of the Borough of Elmbridge, Councillor and Mrs. Nigel Cooper.

After all participants had filled their plates, the entertainment began.



Sophie Matthew, a pupil at Claremont Fancourt, sweetly and appropriately sang 'Wade in the

Water' and 'Let there be Peace on Earth'. She was accompanied by the School's Director of Music, Alexis Affonso.

This was followed by a colourful fan dance by the Kingston Chinese Association Junior Dance Group. These young children impressed us by the precision and grace of their movement – a credit to themselves and to their teachers.

A Choir from the Reform Synagogue in Weybridge performed traditional Jewish songs, which finished with us all clapping in time to the music of Hava Nagila.



At this point, we broke for dessert, whilst the stage was prepared for the final act.



This was a spectacular performance by an Indian classical group led by Dr. Ananda Gupta,

who has been a supporter of EMF since its foundation in 2004. We were treated to songs, a display of drumming on instruments, the like of which many had never seen before, and sensuous dancing by Pandit Chowdhury, a well known professional performer.



To conclude the evening, the mayor spoke of his own 'journey of faith' touching Christianity, Islam and Hinduism in his travels. He found it hard to say where he now stood, but was pleased to see the fellowship and unity of purpose, which radiated from those present at the Gala.



We are grateful to all who make our Gala possible, notably Mrs Louisa

Taylor Estate and Facilities Manager, who provides the venue, drinks and catering staff who help the organising committee; the Principal and management of Claremont Fan Court School, the performers and the many others whom I have doubtless forgotten to mention.

Geoff Morris



Funding

We have been fortunate to receive grants over the years from three sources:

- Elmbridge Borough Council
- Community Development Foundation (CDF)
- Surrey Community Foundation.

These grants have enabled us to extend our activities, whilst keeping subscriptions and charges at a reasonable level.

These grants are restricted to specific projects, which we nominate at the time of application. CDF grants, must be spent within a specific time. This caused us an unusual problem, when we learned in August 2007 that we had been awarded a grant of £6,800, which had to be spent by 31st March, 2008. After much soul-searching, we decided that it would be wrong to spend money frivolously and returned £820 unspent.

After the feast came the famine, and it was October, 2008 before we learned that an application for £4000 to the Surrey Community

Fund had succeeded for the purposes of:

1. Publishing and distributing 3 Newsletters
2. Compiling, publishing and distributing 'Faith Briefings'.
3. Follow-up on St.John's Estate project.
4. Family Integration work.



Coming Events

NB: Please let Geoff Morris (01932 868454) know if you are attending any event, so that we can get the numbers right for catering. Unless otherwise stated there will be no charge for events but donations will be gratefully received and can now, of course, be gift-aided.

**Community Action Projects –
Wednesday 23rd January at
Church Gate House, Downside
Bridge Road, Cobham at 7 for
7.30pm.**

This will be an opportunity to discuss Our present and future role in Community projects in conjunction with the police and Elmbridge B.C.

The DVD made on 10th April will be presented, and there will be an opportunity to meet participants in the project.

**Aspects of Judaism – 18th
February, Reform Synagogue,
Weybridge**

Presentations by representatives of the Orthodox, Reform and Liberal Synagogues with questions, discussion and refreshments.

**Debate – What should be the
relationship between Religions
and the State? – Tuesday 17th
March (place to be announced)**

The debate will be led by young and old speakers of various faiths.

**What on earth does spirit mean?
– Sunday 14th June at 6.30pm at
the Sacred Heart Church,
Cobham Surrey**

A discussion on meditation lead by Laurence Freeman, a world-famous monk who believes that meditation 'opens up the common ground of all faiths and cultures'.



PENDING EVENTS

We await confirmation of dates for the following the following:

**Visit to the Coptic Orthodox
Centre, Stevenage – March**

**Visit to the Batai Futul Mosque,
Morden - April**

**Visit to the Japanese Buddhist
Centre - May**



Contacts

Nabil Mustapha (Chairman)
07956 545811

Geoff Morris (Secretary and
Newsletter)
01932 868454

Phyllis Woodhead (Membership
and Events)
01372 468783

Linda Alanko (Newsletter)
01372 465738
E-mail: alanko@sagnet.co.uk

All correspondence should be
addressed to:
The Secretary
Elmbridge Multifaith Forum,
32 Milner Drive
Cobham, Surrey KT11 2EZ
E-mail: [Elmbridgemultifaith@emas-
bc.co.uk](mailto:Elmbridgemultifaith@emas-
bc.co.uk)

Website

Visit our Website at:
www.elmbridgemultifaith.org.uk.

The site contains back copies of
our Newsletter with articles
summarising the tenets of the
major faiths of the World.