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NEWSLETTER

Issue 16

Summer 2011-Spring, 2012

This publication is sponsored by Elmbridge Borough Council

Since our last Newsletter we have:-

- Published our second 'Insights into Faiths' booklet, covering the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths.
- Supported an event for schoolchildren, parents and teachers at Heathside School on 27th March entitled 'Celebration of Our Community - Life, Values and Family.
- Held a Passover Supper on Tuesday, 5th April, led and explained by Rabbi Alan Plancey.
- Taken part in prayers for victims of the Japanese earthquake and tsunami at Shennyoen on Monday 2nd May 2011
- 'Launched' , in conjunction with the Walton Churches, the Walton 'Street Angels' scheme for Walton Centre. The Commissioning Service was held on 17th June in St. Mary's Church, Walton. Leonard Beighton spoke on behalf of the EMF.
- Held our AGM on Tuesday, 21st June.
- Hosted a fascinating Talk and Slide Presentation on The Dead Sea Scrolls by Robert Feather on Tuesday 12th July.
- Visited the YounHwaSa Korean Buddhist Temple in New Malden and the Ahmadiyya Peace

Symposium and International Summer Meeting.

- Held a barbecue and swimming event at the home of Geoff Morris on 7th August.
- Organised a discussion on ' God in my Faith' on Thursday, 15th September at the Ahmadiyya Mosque in Morden, with brief presentations by members of the Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian and Muslim Faiths. Over 70 people attended.
- Held Circle Dancing sessions at the Thames Ditton EMF Centre, organised by Betty Sear and Rushna Master on the second Tuesday of each month beginning in September.
- Co-organised a 'Together for Peace' reflexion on November 2nd in the Parish Rooms of the Church of the Holy Name.

Our work up to 31st March was supported by a large 'Faiths in Action' grant from the Community Development Fund, and subsequently by a smaller grant from Elmbridge Borough Council

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. The 'subscription year' runs from 1st April to 31st March

We now have over 100 members.

For enquiries about membership, please contact the Membership Secretary:

Phyllis Woodhead
01372 468783



Grants and Costs

Our very generous grant of £11,826 from the 'Faiths in Action' programme of the Community Development Foundation expired on 31st March a year ago.

We have been awarded a grant of £750 from Elmbridge. We are very grateful for this and it enables us to produce at least one newsletter during 2011-12, as well as contributing to other costs. However, we are now largely dependent on donations and subscriptions.

Increased postal charges have caused us to use email wherever possible and to deliver printed communications by hand. However, we do our best to ensure that we keep all our members informed of events even if they do not have a computer. Please forgive us if we slip up occasionally.



The Heathside Event - 27th March, 2011

This was a 'first' for EMF, and we were honoured by the presence of the Mayor and Mayoress, Councillor and Mrs. Barry Cheyne.

A group of 9 Walton schools have, for some time been working on a project to establish the values that the children will try to respect in their daily lives, and promote in the Community.

The objective of the Heathside Event was for the children and teachers of the various schools to share their thoughts with parents and each other and to present the activities which have resulted.

Our role was to prepare a display of the beliefs and practices of the major religions of the world, supported, of course, by our 'Insights into Faiths' booklets. We also provided a buffet of foods from other nations and cultures.



Passover Supper on Tuesday, 5th April, conducted by Rabbi Alan Plancey

Introduction:

This was yet another event arranged by EMF to increase awareness of the significance and meaning of observed religious traditions.

With the aid of a sumptuous supper, the eminent Rabbi Alan Plancey, was able to guide us through the traditional

meal, using the items of food presented to each of us on a plate.

Those present represented a real diversity of faiths and ethnic backgrounds. Jews, Christians, Muslims, Bahá'ís, Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists, and, perhaps, non-worshippers were all represented within a total attendance of a little over 70 people.

A shortened version of the order of the celebration (*The Haggadah*) was given to everyone present to enable us all to follow the discourse. The real meaning of Haggadah is in effect “story book”. It also means “never give up hope”

Rabbi Plancey was introduced by Stan Conway. Rabbi Plancey is a Councillor, a Chaplain to the Police and to Luton Airport, and is frequently the guest of honour in weddings, interfaith and other gatherings.

Rabbi Plancey introduced the evening by affirming that Judaism is essentially a “family faith”, and all events and discussions tend to include the children. A woman who is God fearing is considered a “Ruby”, and the grandmother a “fortune”. Women tend to be put “on a pedestal” in Judaism.

Passover celebrates the events recounted in Exodus Chapters 11 and 12, when the King of Egypt had still refused to free the Israelites from slavery, despite many plagues. Finally God resolved to kill the first-born son of every Egyptian family, 'passing over' the Israeli families, who should mark their houses with the blood of a sacrificial animal applied with a piece of hisop.

Rabbi Plancey said that Passover is also associated with the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem. White clothes

and a white tablecloth are signs of purity

The symbolism of the supper is evident in every item. Burnt smoked egg is a symbol of life and is the only food which the more it is boiled the harder it gets, thus being a reminder of the hard times endured and sacrifices made during slavery.

The longer parsley is chewed the more bitter it gets, also indicating the bitterness of slavery. But dipping the parsley in salt water reminds us of freedom.

Horseradish, being a bitter herb, also reminds of the bitterness of slavery.

The salt water in the centre symbolises tears.

Two asparagus spears laid in opposite directions represent the neck and shank bone of the sacrificial lamb

The wine is symbolic of gladdening of the spirit and also a reminder of the continuity of the product of the vine.

The “Seder” or the Order

There is a total of 15 orders with cleanliness being emphasised in the form of washing of hands at several intervals. Spirituality is the other inseparable atmosphere and ethic.

The event brings together priests, levites (holy people) and commoners.

After washing hands, we started with some parsley followed by reciting a blessing. Then the middle of three “*Matzas*” (crusty unleavened, unsalted thin wafers like an overgrown cracker) is taken. This represents the poor bread that the Israelites were given when in Egypt, and it tells everyone to be happy as human needs are really very simple. Nevertheless, it is a feast in

which we invite anyone to join, especially the needy, the hungry and the stranger. The over-riding thought is that we are all slaves until we reach a state when we can say “**NO**”, and we recognise the difference between wanting and needing. This is therefore the night when only unleavened bread is eaten, as well as bitter herbs.

People lean rather than sit, when eating in deference to the state of slavery and then freedom.

The four kinds of sons:

Fathers are duty bound to talk to their children about Passover. Four kinds of sons are described: the wise, the wicked, the dull and the young. There is, however, a fifth: the very righteous, and a sixth, who is totally lost and given up. These descriptions are explained referring to texts from the Old Testament, particularly relating to the questions asked by these children concerning the significance of historical events related to the early history of Israel, and the answers given.

Delivery from slavery:

History notes that after 210 years of slavery, God heard the cries of the Children of Israel. He first gave them Joseph who, by virtue of his wisdom, became the “Viceroy” of Egypt. Then He gave them Moses, who was rescued from the Nile river where He was found in a basket, having been abandoned.

The 10 Plagues

Traditionally people are fearful of blood, frogs, lice, pestilence, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and the death of the first born.

For this reason, the tradition is to dip a finger in the wine and spill a little. Thus, pain is felt, but as no one dies,

the celebration becomes that of success not failure.

In all, there are four cups of wine available, and drinking one of them is saying thank you to God, even for the sad things as they may prove to be a blessing. The order also is not to upset people.

The blessings of the Matzah

This is the phase of the tradition that adds blessings to the traditional programme and directly precedes the proper meal and the end of the day’s celebrative commemoration of the Passover. The head of the family (father) uncovers the rest of the Matzah (bread) and gives a piece to every member of the family. These morsels are dipped in a hard mixture called “kharoseth”, (which literally means concrete, and is a reminder of building) and extremely bitter radish (Maror). It is symbolism to hardening of oneself and facing a bitter life. Blessings are recited.

The meal and open door to welcome Elijah

This is the final and most solemn part of the evening. It is an invitation to the return of Elijah, who is traditionally thought of as the prophet who ascended to Heaven from Mount Carmel, and whose return is a sign for the advent of the “Day of the Lord”. In a way, the symbolism is similar to that of the “Last Supper”.

The father distributes the “Afikoman”, after which nothing else is eaten. But the third and the fourth glass of wine are then drunk with the prayers that the next year the meal will be in Jerusalem.

An abbreviated history of the Jewish people

It is a tradition that the family recalls the history of the Children of Israel, Joseph and Moses and Aaron. The

emphasis is on it being a “spiritual journey” and the need to maintain faith and the covenant.

IN CONCLUSION:

WE all enjoyed the meal, and the social atmosphere of the evening. Rabbi Plancey was sincerely thanked, and thanks were also due to Stan and Phyllis, and to Rushna and all of our members who kindly worked so hard to make the evening such a joy and a success.

Nabil M Mustapha



ADDRESS AT SHENNYO-EN (Long Ditton, Surrey) AT PRAYER SESSION ON MONDAY 2ND MAY 2011 FOR THE VICTIMS OF THE FUKUSHIMA EARTHQUAKE & TSUNAMI: 11th. March, 2011

We were invited to attend and address this prayer meeting for the victims of the earthquake. Nabil Mustapha, Geoff Morris and Leonard Beighton represented us, and Nabil spoke to the meeting as follows:

Dear friends,

On behalf of Elmbridge Multifaith Forum, I wish to thank Shinnyo-En for including us on this memorable prayer session for the victims of the recent Earthquake and Tsunami in NE coast of Japan.

I speak in my individual capacity as well as the representative of members of the EMF and the Executive Committee, and I share the grief and agony that must be in all our hearts when we think of the poor souls who have lost their lives or have been injured in that “mother of Tragedies” where the highest recorded earthquake strength was noted, and the damage was compounded by the Tsunami and subsequent blow-up of the nuclear reactors.

While we can all stand amazed at the dignity of the Japanese people and the composure with which they faced and are still facing the tragedy, we become immediately aware of the strength of that nation and its fortitude in facing similar disasters in the past. On all such occasions they emerge with utter alacrity and exemplary efficiency to mend every destruction and revive the lives and livelihood of its people, accepting their fortune and pursuing their collective ability to share their grief and thus lessen its burden.

I am here to tell all of us gathering, and hopefully through them to our brothers and sisters in Japan, that they do not grieve alone. That we share the feelings of loss by those who have lost their dear ones, and the difficulties and pains experienced by those who have ended up with injury or illness as a result.

We are told in the Buddhist Scriptures that it is the duty of every individual to clear his thoughts from all evil. As that this is the surest way to end suffering. I sincerely hope that every one of us here, and elsewhere would heed this message. If we can all collectively clear our minds from evil thoughts and put in place new mindsets of the unity of humankind and the oneness of our thoughts in sharing our bounties and our sufferings, then, as the Dhammapada in Buddhism tells us: *“Mind is chief; If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, Then happiness follows him. Even as the shadow that never leaves.”* In the Qur’an we are told that those who are brought nigh (to God), (shall be rewarded) with a *“breath of life, and plenty, and a Garden of delight”*. And dear friends, let us not forget what Jesus Christ taught on the Sermon of the Mount: *“Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted, and Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God”*

Bahá’u’lláh, the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith teaches us to: *“Be generous in your days of plenty, and be patient in the hour of loss”*. You,

the Japanese, have shown us exactly that: generosity as well as patience.

Thank you

Nabil M Mustapha



**The Walton Street Angels Project
Launched on 17th June in St.
Mary's Church, Walton**

This EMF initiative has now become a charity supported by the following Walton Churches: St. Mary's and St John's, Walton Baptist, St Andrew's URC, Walton Methodist and Cornerstone.

Canon Charles Stuart chairs the charity and Rushna Master represents us as one of the trustees.

Leonard Beighton, our Treasurer spoke on our behalf at the commissioning service.

A Co-ordinator has been appointed. 16 Angels have been trained and operate on 3 Friday nights per month. They are equipped with radios.

The feed-back from them and the police is very positive.



**AGM on Tuesday, 21st June at the
EMF Centre, Thames Ditton.**

The meeting was attended by The Mayor and Mayoress of Elmbridge, Councillor and Mrs. John Sheldon , as well as 12 members of the Executive Committee and 16 others.

Minutes of the meeting can be obtained from the Secretary.



**Talk on 'The Dead Sea Scrolls'
by Robert Feather on Tuesday
12th July at The EMF Centre**

This fascinating talk was attended by over seventy people and held everyone spellbound. It was accompanied by excellent refreshments largely due to the efforts of Rushna Master and Phyllis and Stan Conway.

Robert Feather explained that he was a metallurgist and engineer with a strong interest in archaeology and world religions. The combination of his areas of expertise led him to focus on one particular Dead Sea Scroll made of copper and on which he deciphered the word 'Akhenaton' - the name of an Egyptian King who developed a form of monotheism with many resemblances to Christianity.

We were shown pictures and evidence which built up convincing links between Akhenaton's Egypt, the Essenes, John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth.

Mathew's Gospel 2.13 tells us that Joseph was told by an Angel to take Jesus and Mary into Egypt in order to escape the slaughter, decreed by Herod, of all boys under the age of 2. They stayed there until after the death of Herod, probably some two years later.

Robert has written several books on the subject which we were able

to buy and have signed. He has worked on BBC programmes.

We were, indeed, privileged to be able to listen to Robert and thank Stan Conway for making the arrangements.

Geoff Morris



Visit to the YounHwaSa Korean Buddhist Temple in New Malden

VENUE:

The temple is a converted property on a side road in New Malden, an area of Kingston upon Thames popular with the Korean community of the UK. A few Korean scripts on the outside belie the serene and ornate praying and meditating area in the hall inside, with three statues of Buddha and two Bodhisattvas (a being that compassionately refrains from entering nirvana in order to save others and is worshipped as a deity in Mahayana Buddhism, one of the two main branches of Buddhism) in golden colour in the inner sanctuary.

The hall's ceiling is covered with pink paper lanterns of lotus flower with tags dangling in between.

We all sat on cushions on the floor, and, as our number was between 35 & 40, we managed to use every cushion.

Address by Ven. Jisu Sunim, the monk in charge of the Temple.

An amiable genteel man in a flowing grey robe welcomed us and addressed us in measured well chosen words, thanking us for including the visit with the many other engagements that we all must have. He said that we represent so many different faces, features and ways of life, and so he

will try to make our time with him "as sunny as it is on the outside" (it was a glorious sunny 2.00pm.)

He appreciates the diversity of the people, whether they are religious, agnostics, Quakers or any other denominations.

As a Buddhist monk, he tries to utilise his energy to generate harmony and peace not only between fellow human beings but also with all other elements around us so that we can fundamentally resolve ever escalating conflicts between all forms of deluded notions of 'allies' and 'enemies'. One should calmly and deeply investigate the fact that everything in this world is without single exception tightly and closely inter-related, so that we should genuinely endeavour to make life happy by cooperating with others regardless of all differences in isms, beliefs, species etc. When we successfully go beyond our own self-serving petty 'I, me, mine first' bigotry, we see that the 'Big Mind' of all the outside world is nothing more than 'our own extended body parts'. Surely then we can readily engage in our own business of happy living, whilst having all other people's happiness in mind as well. Thus our living style may be steadily transformed from self-imprisoning egotistic greedy acquisition into 'all the universe is one big flower' sharing. By contemplating the ever changing and beautiful diversity in unity of all things visible and invisible, we can cultivate the way we speak, the way we move and the way we think. We try diligently not to be violent, coarse and careless but gentle, generous and mindful to both ourselves and others.

There then followed a period of questions and answers.

Question: Why should there be a statue for Buddha?

Answer: There was no statue of the Buddha in human form for the first 500 years or so after Buddha's passing away. Only a symbol like His footprint was made. Anthropomorphic statues have been a reflection of the effect of the ancient Greek culture by Alexander the Great and their tendency to create statues in human forms. This metal statue is a symbol. We do not believe in idol worship. The statue is just a reminder of a Noble Being, the Buddha who has perfected his all embracing universal compassion in its fullness.

Question: What does the lotus flower symbolise?

Answer: It symbolises taking all the turmoil and difficulties of social life as opportunities to learn and grow rather than being hurt and disappointed, just as a lotus flower in murky water produces beautiful and fragrant flowers by taking and digesting every element in it. We commemorate the Buddha's birthday by parading on the street with all the participants holding lotus flower lanterns with candle light inside and contemplating the 'skilful' way of living.

Question: What is the key feature of the Temple?

Answer: The Temple is originally established to accommodate the Korean community, providing them with a space in which to cultivate a beautiful mind of mutual understanding and social gathering by sharing common Korean traditional culture. In general we try to help people from a different

cultural background to assimilate into British society through the Buddhist way of moral beauty, mental calmness and illuminating wisdom. We have a programme of meditation between 7 & 9 pm on Thursdays for local people. They chant for 20 minutes, sit for meditation for 40 minutes and may have a tea afterwards.

Question: What is different in Korean Buddhism?

Answer: Korean Buddhism was mainly introduced from China in the form of later developed Mahayana Buddhism. It stresses the importance of helping all other sentient beings rather than being only concerned about one's own well being and enlightenment. But the essence of Buddhism is the same among all Buddhist countries. There is Unity in ever colourful cultural Diversity among Buddhist countries.

Question: What are these tags hanging from the ceiling?

Answer: Each has the name and birth sign of a person, e.g. "white tiger or snake".

Question: How many members belong to this congregation?

Answer: About 150 families. There are approximately 30-40 regular attendants on Sundays, and 5-6 on Thursdays.

Question: Are there any methods to overcome anger or negative emotions?

Answer: Yes. There are several different types of meditation methods. One of them is mindful breathing in and out. While watching one's own ongoing inhalation and exhalation process one may slowly recognize that all phenomena are ever changing and impermanent and the hot blood of anger becomes pacified. One may also realize the fact that anger and

negative emotions are caused by one's own deluded mind-set and are self destructive rather than alleviating the situation.

Question: What is the future of Buddhism?

Answer: Buddhism as a living organism is evolving and continuously opening up to the further "enlightenment" which is "Buddhism". Knowledge and intelligence are no one's monopoly but open to everyone and everything. Buddhism encourages people to cultivate human intelligence so as to investigate the cause of ills and discover the way of deliverance. Each one of us sees the world through our own narrow view like looking at a sample through a microscope. But if we use a telescope we see the wider aspects of the world. So we may open our heart to appreciate other faiths and cultures. Human evolution may in the long run go finally beyond all religions, ethnicity and nationalities. In this context, Buddhism as an intelligence oriented religion, has something to offer to enhance the well being of both our humankind and all other living beings in general.

Question: Are you the teacher or leader or one of the flock?

Answer: I am technically a teacher, but I consider myself as one of the flock.

Question: Having visited many Buddhist monasteries, I was fascinated with children (students) sitting in the lotus posture and reciting. Is it the same here?

Answer: Quite the same. The emphasis is on meditation and simple manual works, not just accumulating knowledge by reading. Thus candidates for monastic vocations first learn to be silent and to look inside rather than

being continuously driven by outside distraction. After six months, they will be assessed for suitability to be admitted to the monastic community. After entry to a monastery they study Buddhist scriptures, other religions and may also widen their knowledge in other subjects. But the culmination of monastic life is in meditation during which one's intellectual sum total is synthesized and transformed into all inclusive wisdom, a clean mirror seeing things as they truly are without any distortion of prejudices, strong views and preconceived ideas.

Question: Do you have pilgrimage to "Lumbini" (*The Buddha's birthplace in India*)?

Answer: We may go to Lumbini and also to places where He (*The Buddha*) was awakened and "enlightened". The purpose of pilgrimage is to contemplate on what life is about and get some inspiration from the footprints of the Noble being.

Question: What will happen at the end of our life, and with incarnation?

Answer: There are two different ways of understanding the doctrine of re-incarnation. First, if you want to know your next life, look at yourself here and now. If you want to know your previous life, also look at yourself here and now. This is your future life and also your present life, and your past life still. Every one of us here and now is the sum total result of our own doings in previous time through body, speech and mind and likewise our oncoming future life is also the sum total effect of our own doings here and now through body, speech and mind. When you put this question of 'the end of life', you are unconsciously positing 'time

and space' as something linear. But one may fathom these mysterious qualities of what we call Time and Space as neither linear nor separate entity, but rather some chaotic-everflowing one thing in complete unison. We may also take the shape of infinity ∞ for these bizarre qualities.

The other understanding is that sentient beings are endlessly reincarnating into one of six different forms of living beings according to one's own actions, namely 1. Hell (if one does horrible things in life) 2. Hungry Ghost (If one is a greedy, insatiable being with a narrow needle-thin throat but mountain size belly) 3. Animal (If one does stupid things) 4. Fighting Demon (If one always engages in fighting or finding fault with others). 5. Angel. 6. Human.

Social end of the visit and refreshments

We were greeted with loving kindness from a number of young ladies offering us "mulberry tea" and biscuits as well as bead bracelets for prayers similar to rosaries.

We thanked the Ven. Jisu and the ladies and wish them and their congregation every happiness and prosperity.

Nabil M Mustapha



Barbecue and swimming event at the home of Geoff Morris on 7th August.

The weather this year was of 'dubious' quality, though it did not, in the event, turn out to be as bad as we had feared.

About 15 people took the risk and enjoyed an afternoon of pleasant conversation and enjoyable food with intermittent sunshine.



GOD IN MY FAITH

A Multifaith mini Seminar held at Baitul Futuh Ahmadiyya Mosque, Merton on Thursday 15th. September 2011

Introduction:

The seminar was an event arranged as part of the activity of Elmbridge Multi-Faith Forum (EMF), and the kind and generous offer of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association of UK (AMA) to hold and host it at their Mosque was gratefully accepted.

An estimated attendance of 150 included members and guests of both the Ahmadiyya Mosque and EMF, of both genders and diverse religions.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Nabil M. Mustapha, Chairman of EMF and a Bahá'í, and the speakers represented the Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian and Muslim Faiths.

Mr Nazim Ghauri, OBE, was the lead organiser for the event on behalf of the AMA, and conducted the programme in collaboration with the chair. He welcomed the attendants and introduced a short recitation of the Qur'an in both Arabic and English.

SPEAKERS

Mr Sharock Vafadari: A Zoroastrian, born in Iran to a priestly family, Sharock came to England to pursue his studies and chose chemical engineering as his career. He is

currently engaged in the petrochemical industry, lives with his wife in Ashted, and they have three children and seven grandchildren.

Mr Vafadari spoke about the Zoroastrian belief in the one God, the mighty Creator, the Omnipotent, the Omniscient, and also the unseen.

Zoroaster appeared in the Lower Siberian Steppes and migrated towards what is now North Afghanistan, the Indus Valley and the Plateau of Iran. His Teachings are in a language similar to the Bukhari.

From the time of the Bronze age there were two deities recognised: Ahura and Devas. They were considered natural phenomena similar to the sun, the moon, fire and so on. Zoroaster rejected Devas and selected Ahura Mazda (an abstract name), who is a being of no gender, but with supreme power and great wisdom. Ahura Mazda is all goodness, and all goodness is Ahura Mazda. He taught that kindness to a patient is like a medicine, and truth is best. It brings happiness when it is for goodness' sake and not for reward. There is no room for wrath or animosity, and Ahura Mazda is not to be feared.

We need prayers for peace of mind and we should try to make the world a better place with compassion and mercy. The motto is:

**Good thoughts Good
deeds Good words**

Mrs Lynette Nusbacher: A member of the Reform Synagogue in Weybridge, Lynette is a Senior Lecturer in War Studies at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, and a Director of the strategy think tank Nusbacher Associates. She has many other engagements at high levels including the Cabinet Office, and is a published author of books and articles. She lives in Surrey and has two daughters.

Lynette spoke about the great sense of responsibility instilled in Judaism. She mentioned the "Universal law" and its timeless value. The God of Judaism is merciful, kind, open handed, and beneficent. But He is also "severe". A clean (kosher) kitchen is symbolic of general cleanliness, important and practical.

She talked of millennia of Rabbinical traditions: things to do or not to do in the name of God.

Lynette then described that Judaism relies on the Torah plus oral briefings to Moses. It is a practical rather than a theological religion. Everything one does, is done with the help of God: God the good.

Mr Geoffrey Morris: Geoff is a co-founder of EMF and has been its secretary from the start. He is active in the Anglican Church, but was brought up as a Baptist and became a Deacon and lay preacher. He has a strong "streak" of Roman Catholicism in his heritage. He sees himself as a "Christian heretic". He has always had a strong interest in other faiths, and has worked closely with Balkan Muslims. He has two children and 5 grandchildren.

Geoff. started by stating that Christ, taught that practising the 'law' is less important than loving God and your neighbour. Observance of the Sabbath should not prevent you from healing people or doing other good acts. God is loving and forgives those who repent.. God is not just the God of the Jews but is available to all human beings.

We are like fish in a bowl, and perceive only a small part of creation. We cannot comprehend eternity, infinity or the totality of the conscious, creating, maintaining force that is God. The prophets and Jesus Christ give us glimpses of the nature of God, telling us that God cares about individuals,

hears their prayers and may, in some instances, directly respond.

In the years immediately following the crucifixion, as the 'Acts of the Apostles' tell us, the disciples expected that Christ would return very soon. To maintain written records of Christ's teachings does not seem to have been a priority, as the disciples prepared for the 'Second Coming' by spreading the Word, sharing possessions and trying to live the 'Kingdom of God'. The first three Gospels were not written until some 40 years after Christ's death and the Gospel according to John much later.

Meanwhile the Christian 'missionaries', including Paul, were setting up Churches throughout the Roman world, and these Churches were periodically persecuted for failing to recognize the Roman Gods, including the Emperor.

A radical change occurred in 313 A.D. when the Emperor Constantine made Christianity an authorized religion of the Roman Empire. Shortly afterwards, in 315 A.D., Constantine invited about 300 Church leaders, 'bishops', to meet at Nicaea to settle a dispute about the relationship between Christ and God.

According to the Gospel of St. John, Jesus said: "Who has seen me has seen the Father". So is Jesus God in human form?

The Council of Nicea formulated the concept of the 'Trinity', whereby there is one God who has three 'aspects' - 'Father' (Creator, Sustainer), 'Son' ('The Way', Teacher, Healer) 'Holy Spirit' (Ever-present Comforter). This doctrine was incorporated first in the 'Nicene Creed' and then in the 'Apostles' Creed

Geoff said that, with very few exceptions, Christian Churches of all kinds - Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Baptist - accepted the Doctrine of the Trinity set out in these creeds.

Maulana Atual Mujeeb Rashed:

Born in Qadyan, India, Maulana is a son of a renowned missionary of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Schooling and University educated in Pakistan. He received a gold medal in Arabic, and he speaks several languages, including English, Urdu, Arabic and Japanese. He served in Japan, Korea, travelled extensively, and was one time Amir UK. He is now Imam to the London Mosque. He is engaged in educational and collaborative work with universities and churches. He is married, and is blessed with four children and ten grandchildren.

Maulana started his talk by mentioning God or Allah, as the Supreme Being, the Sole Creator, and the Sustainer of all creation. He is also a very "personal" God, the Provider, the Forgiver. He is God of mercy, love, and compassion. He signifies Unity. God is One. There are no associates. No "Shirk" (Arabic for association). Prior to Islam, Maulana said that there were many "Allahs". After Islam, there is only one Allah. God's attributes are immeasurable. He has 99 names in Islam to describe His many attributes (Al Asma' Al Hosna, or the Excellent names). The verse: "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate" is mentioned 114 times in the Qur'an.

Allah, said Maulana is the Lord of all the world, independent, and never begotten. He is the God of the "Day of Judgement". There is no God but He, the Living, the Self-subsisting. He is the Lord of all the world. Ch. 57 states that: "Heaven and Earth glorify God".

Discussion and summing up:

A series of written questions from the floor were submitted and replies given by the speakers according to the question. There was a sense of satisfaction from the floor.

Rabbi Sidney Assif of the Reform Synagogue in London, summed up and gave a vote of thanks.

Needless to say, the food provided by the Mosque was superb and plentiful.

The occasion was one of joyful participation and gaining of information.

Nabil M Mustapha



'Together for Peace' reflexion on November 2nd in the Parish Rooms of the Church of the Holy Name

Introduction

It was on October 27th, 1986, that Blessed Pope John Paul II hosted the leaders of the world's faith communities in Assisi to fast and pray for peace. Twenty five years on, Pope Benedict XVI renewed the invitation – and encouraged local faith communities to come together in similar spirit. Elmbridge Multi-Faith Forum heard about this through its Roman Catholic Christian members – and welcomed the opportunity to arrange a suitable event within its autumn programme.

On the night, twenty people gathered. A circle of chairs surrounded an attractive arrangement of flowers, candles and an empty bowl, all on a rainbow peace banner. Each chair carried a welcome sheet, with a brief guide to the process and the words of the Prayer for Peace attributed to St. Francis of Assisi.

Programme & Proceedings:

Tony (Anthony) & Nina (Mrs. McCaffry) set up the Parish Room (& parishioners the kitchen)

Apologies from Monsignor Benedict O'Shea, the Parish Priest, known to all as Fr. Benny were presented on his behalf, and best wishes conveyed to him.

Rushna Master and EMF friends were welcomed.

Participants introduced themselves, then the hour of reflection focussed on peace in four areas: *our world; our country; our community; our selves*. Two questions were raised each time: What is my concern? What can we, as people of faith, do to move towards a more peaceful situation? To help get reflection started, five key words were voiced before each period of silent reflection together. The four focus points were introduced in turn by Jackie Foster, and reflected upon in turn. These points were:

Focus One: Our World. Wars? Famine? Inequality? Climate change? Insecurity?

Focus Two: Our Country. Crisis? Unemployment? Violence? Division? Uncertainty?

Focus Three: Our Community. Loneliness? Division? The young? Suspicion? Ignorance?

Focus Four: Ourselves. Worries? Fears? Sorrows? Preoccupations? Hopes?

After this time of quiet, sharing was invited and key words 'collected' in the bowl. The hour flew by. Finally, we were invited to offer our bowl full of 'words' to the God of Peace in the prayer of St. Francis. The Chairman warmly thanked everyone for their participation.

Remembrance of St Francis of Assisi: The following well known saying by St Francis was read by Rev. McCaffry

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me show love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled, as to console,
to be understood, as to understand,
to be loved, as to love:
for it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Dr Mustapha in a reflection on these wisdoms by St Francis thought of the present state of the world and mused:
WHAT ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI MAY SAY IF HE WERE ALIVE TODAY

People talk of peace..... and they do war
They speak of love.....and they do hatred
They wish for integrity.....and give us corruption
We love our environment....and are busy desecrating it
We want to be rich.....and never care for the poor
We love to be courteous.....but only exchange bad words

Dr Mustapha then tried to “redeem” humanity by saying:

NO.....NO.....NO !!! WE HERE ARE NOT LIKE THAT WE ARE HERE TONIGHT TO INHALE FROM THE WISDOM OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Refreshments and socialising:

The scheduled half hour for tea and biscuits overran somewhat, due to the many lively conversations – and the unexpected bonus of an opportunity to view the newly refurbished Church. We thanked Fr. Benny (in his absence) and Rev. McCaffry for generously offering their church for the event.

In conclusion

He meeting was invigorating and reflective. There was general agreement that this “formula” should be replicated. A provisional offer from the Japanese Buddhist Centre in Long Ditton will be taken up soon.

Nabil M Mustapha



Monthly Circle Dancing Sessions at the EMF Centre Thames Ditton

Led by Betty Sear, these have been held on the second Tuesday of each month since the 13th September starting at 7pm. Average attendance has been 17.

Dancing in a circle is an ancient tradition common to many cultures for marking special occasions, strengthening community and encouraging togetherness

Modern circle dance draws on the rich and diverse traditional dances of many countries including the Balkans, Greece, Israel, Russia and France. There is also a growing repertoire of new dances to classical music and contemporary songs

Circle dances can be energetic and lively or gentle and reflective.

The style and mood reflects the group and the teacher's interests

The aim always is to experience the joy of dancing with others and to create a sense of well-being and community

Anyone of any age or ability can circle dance. Each dance will be taught by our very own Betty Sear. There's no audience and everyone is welcome



POST SCRIPT

Religion and Politics in the Arab Uprisings Discussion introduced by Stephen Day CMG Churchgate House, Cobham, Thursday, 15th March, 2012

This event, attended by 80 people, took place between the preparation of this newsletter and its publication.

Stephen has spent his working life as a career diplomat in the Foreign Office, specializing in Arab affairs. Having spent time working on the staff of several embassies, notably in Yemen, he became the British Ambassador to Tunis and later to Qatar.

He invited Canon Alistair Macdonald-Radcliff, Director General of the World Dialogue Council and formerly Dean of All Saints' Cathedral in Cairo, to contribute to the initial presentation and to the discussion panel, which answered questions following a break for refreshments. Imam Mehmet Stublla and Dr Nabil Mustapha also joined the panel, which was chaired by Geoff Morris.

The quality of the presentations and the discussion was outstanding and involved an audience which included many other people with in-depth experience of and deep interest in the Arab world.

We have begun to prepare a summary of the content of the evening but we have not yet, as is our habit, checked with the participants that their views are accurately represented. Publication of this Newsletter cannot be delayed, so the report will have to await the next Newsletter.

Suffice it to say, that this was one of the most successful, informative, perceptive and well-attended events that we have ever held and that it was further enriched by the imaginative and tasty refreshments prepared by Carolyne Peterson and Margaret Leamon.

A final note: During our discussions we had lamented that on several occasions, including Iraq in particular, 'we got it wrong'. As I was about to close the evening, one gentleman interrupted to say: "I should like to thank the UK for its role in liberating Kosovo. You saved us from hell!! We suddenly felt much better.

Geoff Morris



Coming Events

Please let Geoff Morris know if you would like to attend any event (01932 868454). This enables us to make appropriate arrangements for refreshments etc.



'Reflection' - Tuesday 8th May at 7pm at the SHENNYO-EN

**Japanese Buddhist Centre, The
Manor House, Woodstock Lane
North, Long Ditton, KT6 5HL**



**AGM - Tuesday 12th June at 7
pm at the EMF Centre, Thames
Ditton**



**'God in my Faith' - Hindu,
Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, Baha'i -
Tuesday, 18th September at 7pm**



**Gala evening, Saturday, 3rd
November at the Joyce Grenfell
Centre, Claremont Fan Court
School, Esher. KT10**

Geoff Morris (Secretary, events
and Newsletter)
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Phyllis Woodhead (Membership)
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www.elmbridgemultifaith.org.uk.

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

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