



Elmbridge Multi-faith Forum

Registered Charity No. 1122962

NEWSLETTER

This publication is sponsored by a Grant from the Surrey Community Foundation

Spring 2011

Issue 15

Since our last Newsletter we have:-

- Published and circulated 1,500 printed copies of our Autumn 2010 Newsletter and added it to our website.
- Held on 22nd January our 7th Annual Gala
- Progressed the Walton Street Angels project.
- Had a talk and discussion on the Baha'i at the EMF Centre on 25th January.
- Provided speakers and resources to Elmbridge schools.
- Prepared for a 'Community Values' event for parents and children to be held at Heathside School, Walton on Sunday 27th March, 2011.

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

Our work during 2010-11 has been helped by a grant of £11,826 from the '*Faiths in Action*' programme of the Community Development Foundation.

This money must be spent before 31st March 2011. The present Newsletter is funded by this grant. Work is in progress on the remaining projects.

We have been awarded a grant of £750 from Elmbridge to enable us to produce at least one Newsletter during 2011-12.

7th Annual Gala in the Joyce Grenfell Centre Claremont Fan Court School on 22nd January

This year, the date had to be changed from its original November 2010 because that date happened to be so inconvenient for many of our members, especially those who were to take an active part in its organisation. As it happened, January proved a good departure from the traditional autumnal schedule, as it provided an event to enjoy after the festive lunches and dinners had been fully digested, the celebrations having faded away into our distant memories, and suddenly the calendar became rather void.

Whatever the circumstance, there is no doubt that this year's Gala was a notable success. It was held at its usual venue, Claremont Fan Court School, Esher, thus punctuating the continued support and generosity of this renowned school and its Principal and staff. How grateful we should be can only be gauged by how difficult it would be to find an alternative venue whose management can be so generous in offering all facilities for the hall, the entertainment, car parking, catering facilities and the wonderful menus made available. Add to that the smoothness and co-operation with which all discussions were conducted, and all details agreed.

The Organising Committee:

With our EMF, every member of the Executive Committee is involved in preparing for the evening. While a core of members, particularly Mrs Rushna Master, Mr Stan Conway, Mrs Phyllis Conway, Mrs Jackie Foster and Mrs Chuyuen Corfield were responsible for the detailed planning, others chipped in with specific tasks, contributions to the food and other assistance. We can see here some of these "core" people at the end of setting up the tables and the hall prior to the arrival



of the guests. It is a joy to see us in the picture flush with the feeling of achievement and in anticipation of the evening ahead.

Attendance:

The number of seats we managed to fit in was about 175. It is safe to say that every seat was taken, and some had standing space only (usually members of EMF Committee). The spread of age, gender, ethnic background, and religious affiliation would make any organisers proud. We certainly were.

The spirit was more like a large family gathering than a simple attendance for food and entertainment. Graced by our Mayor & Mayoress Cllr and Mrs Barry Cheyne, the Principal of Claremont School Mrs Alice Stanley-Dervin, and last year's Mayor Cllr James Vickers and Mrs Vickers, the hall had many noted personalities in various walks of life, as well as families with their children. Our Secretary, Geoff Morris, again acted as MC.

Presentation of a cheque for £1000 for the Walton Street Angels Project:

We were pleased that EMF was able to contribute a further £1000 for this project to assist with purchase of equipment, training and other expenses. The project is jointly sponsored by Churches in Walton, Elmbridge Community Safety Partnership, Surrey Police and ourselves. The cheque was presented to Mr Patrick Samuels of the "Church Army" in Walton

The Buffet:

That sumptuous buffet of vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes was enriched by massive numbers of freshly made Samosas donated by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, and Mrs Rushna Master. As if this contribution was not generous enough, we were further indulged with an array of "Kosher" food presented by our (very Jewish) members Mr and Mrs Conway. This was particularly essential in view of the Jewish Choir that was on the programme. If anyone thinks that kosher food is only for Jewish people, they only had to savour the delights that were on offer. I am sure a change of mind will be instantaneous.

There was no doubt that all round and on every aspect, the food was delicious, varied and plentiful. The service was so courteous and efficient, and we are really grateful to all who made that element of our event so pleasant and fulfilling, whether the school catering staff or the contributors.

The Entertainment:

We were entertained, indeed entranced, by a wide variation. The young Chinese dancers were girls you wished just to look at, never mind being enthralled with their graceful movements and waving of their fans and fancy umbrellas. They were so artistic, and their joy in presenting their numbers was infectious to the audience. The applause was a good indication of how much they were appreciated.

As for the Indian musicians and the graceful gyrating Indian dancers, one can only admire their artistic excellence and professionalism. This was an entertainment that would, in other situations, be too costly for an event run by a poor charity like ours. We were really privileged. Again the audience showed their appreciation.



One of the young Chinese dancers



Then there was the short interlude with our local (Sikh) youth on his Saxophone. It represented our hope that in future we could form the whole programme on our local talents. With him and the Chinese girls, we are nearly there. We appreciated our saxophonist and hope he will give us a further performance next year.

Last, but not least, was the Jewish Choir. Anyone who doubts the Jewish penchant for singing and dancing, and for having the traditional style as though it was the most modern thing composed, will only have to have been present on the evening. We were enchanted with the singing, and were brought to our feet dancing in circles, holding hands, and swaying and laughing (at ourselves mostly !!!).

The end:

Every good thing must come to an end. A very complimentary final comment by our Mayor was followed by the usual thanks given by the chairman. We said goodbye to our Mayor and his wife, and then said goodbye to our guests. **It was a great evening.**

Nabil Mustapha

The Walton Street Angels Project

Rushna Master is our representative on the steering committee which has been formed to take the project forward. A short film about the work of Street Angels was shown at the Gala, and our treasurer handed over the contribution of £1,000, which we obtained from the Faiths in Action fund. The following Walton churches have agreed to support the project: St. Mary's and St John's, Walton Baptist, St Andrew's URC, Walton Methodist and Cornerstone.

The steering committee is chaired by Canon Charles Stuart and consists of representatives of the above churches, plus our own Rushna, Sgt Oliver Smith of Surrey Police and Peter Kipps of the Elmbridge Safety Partnership. Julian Lomas, who has set up Guildford Street Angels, has been appointed as consultant. Proceedings are in hand to set up a charity, to appoint officers, a co-ordinator and volunteer Street Angels, with the help of VAE by 30th March. A training programme has been drawn up.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN ANGELS? COULD YOU BE AN ANGEL . . . A STREET ANGEL?

A new project, 'Street Angels', run by the faith groups of Walton is being set up. The whole concept is to show unconditional love to anyone who is out and about in Walton on a Friday night. This could be by helping to diffuse an argument over a taxi, or giving out flip flops to feet-sore young ladies. It's about listening and being a peaceful presence

Street Angels receive excellent training, plenty of support, and have made a considerable difference to the calmness on the streets in towns such as Guildford and Camberley.

SO WHAT ABOUT YOU VOLUNTEERING?

You do need to be over 18 but no one is too old. For more information please contact:
Rushna on 01932 248751 or email: rushna@master11.wanadoo.co.uk

Talk and Discussion on the Baha'i Faith

*led by Dr Nabil Mustapha at the EMF Centre
25th January 2011*



INTRODUCTION

Elmbridge Multifaith Forum has undertaken to arrange a series of talks on the different faiths and denominations, in its effort to enhance awareness of religion and dispel any prevailing misunderstandings. To that end, all talks will be delivered by an adherent of the faith discussed, and there will always be time for questions and answers.

Dr Mustapha, the chairman of EMF, thought it would be appropriate for him to deliver the first talk in the series, on the Bahá'í Religion. Invitations and arrangements were undertaken, snacks and drinks provided, and the evening was well attended in spite of its being only three days after the EMF 2011 Gala evening.

Dr Mustapha was introduced by Mr Leonard Beighton, the EMF treasurer, and there were posters on the wall about the Bahá'í Faith, as well as pictures of the seven Bahá'ís imprisoned in Iran for their role as coordinators of the beleaguered and banned Bahá'í community in that country - a community that represents the largest minority, and numbers several hundred thousands.

HISTORY OF THE BAHÁ'Í RELIGION

The Báb:

Dr Mustapha began his talk with a brief history of the Bahá'í Religion, which was announced in 1844 in the city of Shiraz, which lies in the southern region of Iran called "Fars". This announcement was given by Mirza Ali Mohammed, later given the name of the "Báb" which means the "Gate" in Persian and Arabic. He declared that his mission was in fulfilment of prophecies recognised at the time by Islamic scholars, and that His Mission was to prepare for the coming very soon of "Him whom God shall make manifest", an indication that the definitive messenger of this day was yet to be revealed; it being the Báb's role to prepare the people for this great event.

The Báb had many thousands of followers, and this attracted the attention and indeed the enmity of both the temporal and the clerical authorities in Iran. Severe antagonism and persecution followed, and over 20,000 of the Báb's followers were martyred and put to death.

A salient episode at a conference (or congress) in a town called Badasht, was when Tahirih (The Pure One), also known by the name Qurratu'l-'Ayn, meaning "solace of the eyes"- a female follower of the Báb and a poetess of great beauty and eloquence – tore off her veil in the midst of a multitude, declaring it was the time for the 'Emancipation of Women'.

For this act, she was to pay with her life, but not before also declaring: “*You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women*”. She became indeed the first woman martyred suffragette.

The Báb, in turn, was martyred in public in the central square of the city of Tabriz in 1850, facing a firing squad of 750 musket men.

Bahá’u’lláh:

This name, meaning *The Glory of God*, was how Mirza Hussain Ali became known. He was born to a noble family and was destined for high office. However, he became a follower of the Báb and quickly assumed an air of piety and dedication, and became renowned as a person of stature among His fellow believers. The Báb had tremendous affection for Him, and it quickly became obvious that Bahá’u’lláh was the person whom the Báb was heralding, and described as “Him whom God shall make manifest”.

Following the martyrdom of the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh and a few of the followers were banished to Baghdad in Iraq, in an action agreed by the Shah of Iran and the Sultan of Turkey. The aim was to extinguish the flame of the movement. This did not materialise. Bahá’u’lláh took some time out to retreat into the Kurdish mountains around Süleymaniye.

He then returned, regrouped the followers and, in 1863, declared that indeed He was “Him whom God shall make manifest”. He announced His mission to the world as well, through a series of missives to the prominent leaders of the time, both temporal and religious, in Europe and the Near and Middle East. Included amongst the sovereigns of the world was Queen Victoria, whose reaction was quite sympathetic.

As the authorities realised that Bahá’u’lláh was unstoppable in His reputation and his following, they banished Him and a few of His followers to Constantinople (now Istanbul), then to Adrianople (now Ederne), and lastly to the most notorious and deadly prison within the Ottoman Empire of the time, the prison of Akka (Acre). He was accompanied by His two sons, one of whom sadly died as a result of falling through an aperture in the roof of the prison while entranced in deep prayer.

Bahá’u’lláh later, as a result of the fall of the then reigning Sultan, was released, first on short “respite” and then on permanent sojourn in a home in Akka. He maintained the flow of His revelations of the Scriptures that now form the core Bahá’í Writings, and passed away in 1892. He was buried in Akka, but had appointed His elder son Abbas Effendi, later named Abdu’l-Bahá, to take over the mantle of His mission.

Abdu’l-Bahá:

Abdu’l-Bahá, born in 1844, was designated by Bahá’u’lláh to be the “Interpreter of His Teachings, and the Exemplar thereof”. His interpretations are accepted as inspired and carry all the weight of Scripture. Having spent 40 years of His life in prison, Abdu’l-Bahá, sought to travel far and wide as soon as His freedom allowed. He travelled to Egypt, Europe and the USA. He expounded on the meanings and significance of His Father’s

Teachings, and managed to conduct Himself and His life in an exemplary manner, demonstrating the real meaning of Bahá'í life. During World War I he remained in Palestine, and managed to create a system of sharing of scarcely available food during the famine that followed the war. For these services he was awarded a knighthood on 27th April 1920 for humanitarian efforts, by the British Mandate of Palestine, in a ceremony presided over by the Military Governor of Haifa.

Abdu'l-Bahá was prolific in His writings, messages, and public and private talks in all the countries He visited, and He laid down the cornerstone for the Bahá'í Temple in Wilmette, just outside the city of Chicago (USA). This was to be the first of a series of temples to be erected thereafter, but not in His lifetime. Following His death in 1921, Abdu'l-Bahá's written Will and Testament revealed that He had conferred the role of "Guardianship of the Bahá'í Faith" on to His grandson, Shoghi Effendi (Effendi being a title of respect or nobility in the Turkish/Persian and Arabic world at the time).

Shoghi Effendi:

Shoghi Effendi represents the first of the holy figures of the Bahá'í Faith who has had a meaningful modern education, his forebears having relied mostly on innate education and knowledge. From the Jesuit (French) Collège de Frères, in Beirut, onto the American University in Beirut, graduating with a BA, he was then sent to Balliol College in Oxford for further studies. However, on his assumption of the role of Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, he had to curtail his studies in Oxford and return to Haifa where he remained all his life except for occasional short visits abroad.

Shoghi Effendi expounded on aspects of the Scriptures of both Bahá'u'lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá, and gave meaning to some of the lesser understood nuances of their writings. However, his main role was the expansion of the Bahá'í Faith through a series of well laid out plans to increase the number of followers and also the translation of literature. All these plans were undertaken completely voluntarily by the Bahá'ís, each according to his or her means and an individual desire to serve the Faith.

In addition, Shoghi Effendi gave form and substance to the Bahá'í Administrative structure, and established parameters for the Bahá'í world to implement the modern aspects of life - taking into account the Bahá'í teachings in addition to expert opinion in every walk of life. He died in 1957, and is buried in The Great Northern Cemetery in London, a site that is considered a Holy place within the Bahá'í world.

Shoghi Effendi had no children. The "Guardianship" was therefore succeeded by an elected body named the Universal House of Justice, with its seat on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel. This body is the pinnacle of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, which is at every level based on the election of nine members, whether at local, national or international levels. Elections are by universal suffrage for any Bahá'í over the age of 21 (man or woman), and is by secret ballot with no candidacy or electioneering. The criteria for election is simply to elect sincere, faithful, experienced and capable souls able and willing to serve the Faith.

Thus: There are no permanent positions in the Bahá'í Faith. There is no clergy, monasticism or religious leaders. There are no saints, holy figures (except the original figures) or Holy Shrines (except the originals). Prayers are individual with no ritual, liturgy or set procedure.

OBLIGATIONS AND ORDINANCES:

The Bahá'í laws and ordinances cover many aspects of life including marriage, divorce, death, inheritance, fasting, prayers (obligatory prayers and non-obligatory reading of revealed tablets), contributions (some obligatory, others voluntary, but all assessments are the individual's responsibility, and never compulsory), and lifestyle matters.

Thus, alcohol and drugs (leisure, narcotic, hallucinatory etc.) are totally prohibited. They are, however, allowed if prescribed by a qualified medical practitioner for medicinal purposes. Smoking is discouraged, but not totally prohibited. There are no dietary restrictions, but the expectation is that the world will rely less and less on animal foods in future and more on fruit and vegetables.

PRINCIPLES AND TEACHINGS OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

- **Progressive Revelation:** Bahá'ís believe in the previously revealed Religions and their Holy books which include Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and, of course, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. They have been the lights of guidance to humanity along the ages, and the educational tools with which God has been able to communicate with man. They are thus equal in value and progressive in their educational achievements. Therefore Bahá'ís believe that *with one God, there can be only one religion, notwithstanding the different names.*
- **Oneness of the Human Race:** "The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens". The Bahá'í Religion aspires and indeed strives to breakdown all barriers created by prejudice, whether on the basis of gender, ethnicity, colour, language, class or education.
- **Equality between man and woman** in all rights and responsibilities. Allowing naturally for the different biological role, every other aspect of life is equally shared. Society can be described as a bird that needs the two wings of man and woman to allow a smooth and effective flight.
- **Equal value of science and religion:** Science alone can be utilised for good or ill, and can easily be mishandled and misconstrued. It also does not cater for the human heart and spirit. Religion alone, however, can be equally detrimental as it can descend into dogma, superstition, and irrelevance to everyday life. The example of the bird applies here as well, so that society needs these two wings (of science and religion) to create a balanced and effective flight.
- **Education for all:** This is imperative, and is the responsibility of the parent, the state or, eventually, the Bahá'í administration. Education of girls is of paramount importance, and should there be any difficulties within a family as regards the provision of education, girls should take precedence for the mother is the educator of the next generation. The aim of education is to allow the realisation of the utmost potential of the individual and should address the worldly needs for knowledge as well as the spiritual needs.

- ***The unfettered search after truth:*** This is the responsibility of the individual, who should not settle for “given wisdoms” without careful consideration of their validity and suitability for him or her. This means that each individual is responsible for his thoughts and actions.
- ***Economic principles:*** aimed at eliminating extremes of poverty and wealth. The responsibility is for the individual and the administration to seek and provide work, and there should be adequate compensation for labour and capital. Sharing of the proceeds and benefits between labour and capital is the desired end, as is the sharing of the world’s resources and human talents.
- ***A “New World Order”:*** Bahá’u’lláh announced in His mission the broad principles of a new world order that relies on a universal language and script (to be taught in addition to people’s own national language), a universal system of currency, weights and measures, and a system of universal arbitration and peace-keeping. Thus, armies should be eliminated, allowing only for what is required to keep peace and order locally. There should be a single world “Policing” force to be deployed only as an enforcer to World arbitration.
- ***World Unity and World peace:*** “Unity in Diversity” (enjoying the diversity, but accepting it within an ethos of unity) and all the measures already mentioned, and other details not mentioned, is the basis for establishing peace and amity within the world. This is the ultimate fulfilment of prophecies of the past, and Dr Mustapha provided the following quotes:

ZOROASTER:

The prophecy of a time when the World-Saviour, the Shah Bahram, will triumph over Ahriman and thus usher in an era of blessedness and peace.

BUDDHA:

The time when “a Buddha named Maitreya, the Buddha of universal fellowship” should....reveal “His boundless glory”.

BHAGAVAD-GITA:

Reference to the “Most Great Spirit,” the “Tenth Avatar” and again, the “Immaculate Manifestation of Krishna.”

ISAIAH

“Glory of the Lord, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace”

EZEKIAL and DANIEL:

“Day of the Lord”

NEW TESTAMENT:

“The New Jerusalem” and the “Day of God”

THE QUR’AN: The prophecies are so plentiful that it suffices to mention :

“The Great Announcement”, “The Day of God” and “The Day when the earth shall shine with the light of her Lord”

IN CONCLUSION:

Dr Mustapha showed the audience several pictures of Bahá’í temples from around the world, and also the Holy Places and Bahá’í World Centre in Haifa and Acre (Akka) in Israel, and concluded with the following two quotes:

HAPPINESS

“Man should be willing to accept hardships for himself in order that others may enjoy wealth; he should enjoy trouble for himself that others may enjoy happiness and well-being.”

“To see the joy of divine gladness on your faces is the cause of my happiness, for when I see you happy, I am happy also.”

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Divine Philosophy, p.69)

The Audience:

Many question were asked, followed by an enjoyable period of socialising and refreshment.

SPEAKERS AND RESOURCES FOR ELMBRIDGE SCHOOLS

We are always ready to try to find speakers or resources to help schools and other organisations to have a better understanding of different faiths, cultures and values.

On 4th February, Chuyuen Corfield gave a short illustrated talk to the children of Walton Oaks Junior School about the Chinese New Year and Calendar.

On 13th July 2010, the morning of our AGM, Rushna Master gave a talk and food display to the children of 3 classes at Cardinal Newman School, who were celebrating India Day. All the children and teachers had dressed in costume and during their break ate samosas and bhajis and then enjoyed their shared curry lunch.

A Celebration of our Community

Following on from the AGM/Launch Party in July 2010 Rushna has worked with Heathside School, helping with an activity for Interfaith Week last November which fed into the Values work the school is undertaking.

Having worked closely with David Scully, Assistant Principal at Heathside School, it seemed like a natural step and a great opportunity to hold our Celebration Event at the school. By the time this Newsletter is published, we would have hosted our 1st “Celebration of our Community – Life Values Family” Event. The event, on Sunday 27th March 2011 at Heathside School Weybridge, aims to bring the Communities of the 9 schools in the Elmbridge Values Group together to share their work on Values whilst enjoying lovely entertainment, International food and good company. Our hope is that some of the children from the 9 schools get involved by providing us with entertainment that explores the title of the day, or just come along to join in the fun! We want to develop an understanding of the common threads that we share as a Community. EMF has prepared various faith displays on show for everyone to look at and ask questions! The Event is open to all and our Mayor and his wife have kindly accepted our invitation to join us to help celebrate! We are also really glad that the Police and Fire Services and Elmbridge Museum are able to join us as they are very much part of our local Community. Thank you to everybody who is helping to make this Event happen!

DIARY DATES

PASSOVER SUPPER - *Tuesday 5th April 2011 at the EMF centre*
Explanation by Rabbi Alan Plancey followed by Fish & Salads Supper

Tickets £5 per person only obtainable in advance from Stan Conway 02084292867
no later than 25th March 2011

DEAD SEA SCROLLS - *Tuesday 12th July 2011 at the EMF Centre*
Talk and Slide Presentation by Robert Feather including buffet refreshments

Admission free. For catering purposes, phone Rushna on 01932 248751 if you are coming,
or email: rushna@master11.wanadoo.co.uk. *Donations always welcome*

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