

Faiths in Harmony

*Harrow Inter Faith Council
celebrates its 25th Anniversary*

1984 - 2009



Foreword

Harrow Interfaith Council presents this brochure to place on record the landmarks of its progress over 25 years. This special occasion will be celebrated with a seminar and entertainment involving the diverse faith communities of Harrow, on Sunday 29th March 2009 at the Zoroastrian Centre, Alexandra Avenue, Harrow, Middlesex.

Dedication

We are all indebted to those far-sighted individuals, in particular Hazel and Roger Whitehead, who took the first steps in establishing the good inter-faith relationships for which the London Borough of Harrow, the most religiously diverse authority in the country, has become renowned. To them, and to those who nurtured the young Interfaith Council in its early days, and to all whose unflinching enthusiasm and devotion has helped to further its aims, this account of some of its activities and achievements is dedicated.



Prayers at the Harrow war memorial by faith representatives

CONSTITUTION

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To promote dialogue and understanding among the Faith Communities of Harrow.
- To promote educational projects and events whereby faiths can teach others about their beliefs and valued, enabling participants to learn about and appreciate the richness of the religious and philosophical traditions in the local and wider community.
- To encourage the development of respect for the religious beliefs and customs of others, while honouring the personal beliefs of individuals.
- To foster friendship and understanding between people of faith.
- To work for harmony and peaceful co-existence in the local community and to oppose prejudice wherever it exists.
- To work with the Harrow Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) and to make a contribution to religious education and collective worship in schools.
- To encourage young people in their youth organizations, faith communities, local colleges and universities to participate in interfaith activities.
- To work together for the solution of problems experienced by local faith communities in the practice of their religion.
- To co-operate with other groups and networks with similar aims and objectives.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to corporate groups and individuals who fulfil the following requirements:

- Reside, work or worship in or near the London Borough of Harrow.
- Agree with the aims of Harrow Inter Faith Council.
- Pay the subscription as agreed by the AGM.

HARROW INTERFAITH COUNCIL 1984-2009

ORIGINS

1983 - 15th November

“Consultation on Multi-Faith Dialogue” Representatives from Harrow churches were convened by the Reverends Hazel and Roger Whitehead of Trinity Church. Hindes Road, Harrow.

Purpose: to explore ways of establishing contacts between the Faiths in the Harrow area.

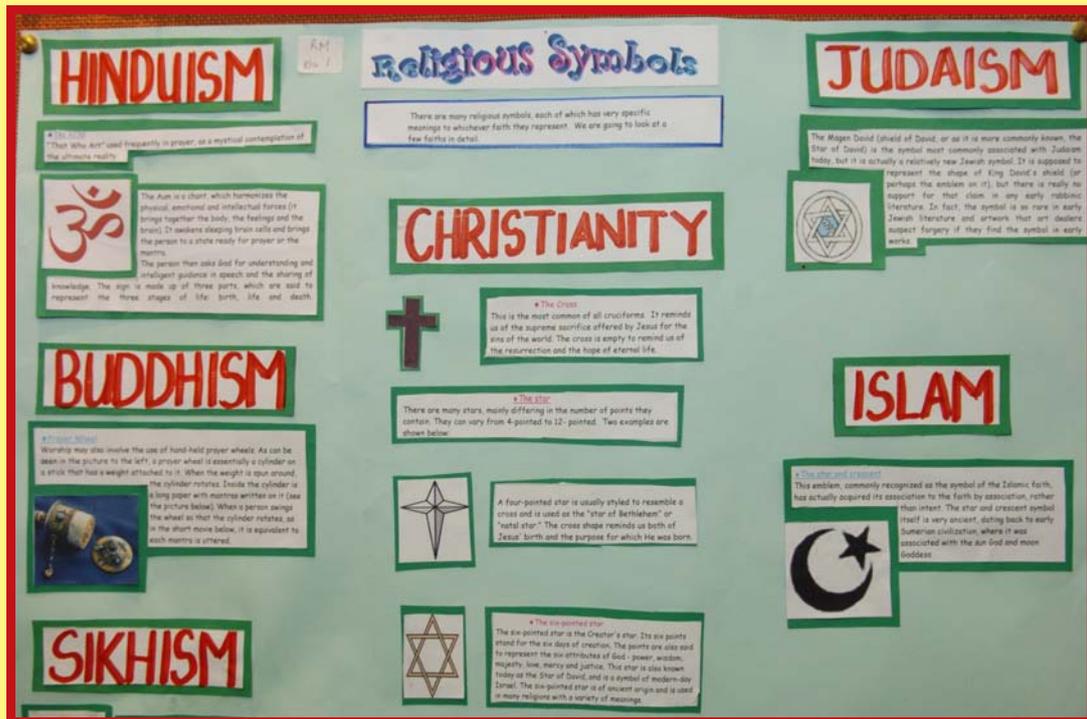
1984 - 17th July

Harrow Interfaith Council was inaugurated with membership drawn from the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian Communities

1984 - 9th October

The CONSTITUTION was presented and adopted at the Council's first meeting. The Constitution has been revised and modified over the years to adapt to changing conditions and needs and this process is still on-going.

1991 - Hazel and Roger resigned from Harrow Interfaith Council when they moved to ministry in another area. At a farewell gathering they were presented with books by faith representatives.



Children's work in Harrow schools

COLLABORATION

Harrow Council

Harrow Interfaith Council has sought to work in co-operation with Harrow Council, throughout its existence. Mayors and Councillors of all political persuasions and religious affiliations have been happy to grace our events. Increasingly over the years Harrow Council has called on Harrow Inter Faith Council to participate in municipal events and ceremonies.

1995 In 1995 Harrow Inter Faith Council organised jointly with Harrow Council, a Borough Interfaith Service for Peace. The service, marking the 60th anniversary of the end of the 2nd World War, was held on 23rd July 1995 at RAF Stanmore Park.

1998 To ensure more equitable representation of the borough's diverse faiths and communities, Harrow Inter Faith Council requested participation in Harrow's annual Service of Remembrance each November. Since 1998 Harrow Inter Faith Council has appointed one of its faith representatives to read the universal prayer for peace as part of the service.

2005 On 26th June 2005, at the dedication of the new war memorial, Harrow Inter Faith Council led the participants in the Millennium Act of Commitment. The proclamation of the Act of Commitment, led by Harrow Inter Faith Council members, has been incorporated into the rubric of the Harrow Remembrance Day Service and also into the Civic Service, held annually when a new Mayor takes office. In February 2005 Harrow Inter Faith Council assisted in the organisation of the borough's Tsunami Disaster Memorial Service and Relief Appeal.

Again in October of 2005 Harrow Interfaith Council was represented at the Multi-Faith Memorial Service for victims of the Pakistan and Indian Kashmir earthquake. Harrow Inter Faith Council has also participated in the Borough's "Under One Sky" event.

We are grateful to Harrow Council for its recognition of our work and for the help and support they give us. We look forward to continuing collaboration with Harrow Council and hope for their continuing support.

Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)

During the first year of its existence Harrow Inter Faith Council (HIFC) established a strong and enduring link with SACRE. This has proved to be a helpful and fruitful collaboration for both sides, with HIFC nominating faith members to serve on SACRE and to help with the task of religious education in the borough's schools, while SACRE has co-operated with many of HIFC's initiatives and activities. HIFC members have led collective worship in schools and assisted in teaching about their respective faiths.

1987 At its AGM in 1987 HIFC reported that it was pressing Harrow Council to take religious education in its schools more seriously. HIFC was subsequently able to report the appointment of Pat Stevens as Religious Education Adviser to Harrow Schools; liaison with HIFC was designated as one of her duties.

1989 – 2007 Pat attended her first HIFC meeting on 12th November 1987. Later, from 1989 to 2007, Pat, sometimes as Secretary and sometimes as Chair, proved to be an energetic, indefatigable and inspirational leader of HIFC.

HIFC members have also assisted in religious education in Tertiary and Sixth Form Colleges, which fall outside the remit of SACRE.

Other Organisations with which HIFC co-operates

The Interfaith Network for the UK, Brent Interfaith and Westminster Interfaith
Harrow Council for Racial Equality (HCRE)
Harrow Police and Community Consultation Committee (HPCCC)

ACTIVITIES

HIFC seeks to implement its aims and objectives through a variety of activities.

MEETINGS

Faith encounters, dialogues and meetings have been organised in which a wide range of topics of common interest and concern have been discussed and information about religious beliefs and practices exchanged.

Visits to places of worship and to centres of religious learning, culture and significance have been made.

PILGRIMAGES

Sometimes these visits have been made in the context of pilgrimages, such as the Grand Metro Pilgrimage on July 2nd 1994, when pilgrims, travelling on foot or by Underground, visited the Husaini Shia Islamic Centre Stanmore, St Mary's Church Harrow-on-the-Hill, the Burmese Buddhist Vihara in Kingsbury, the Brahma Kumaris Global Co-operation House in Willesden, the Shree Swaminarayan Temple in Willesden Lane and the Zoroastrian House and Temple at that time situated in West Hampstead.

Often we have taken part in the inspiring pilgrimages organised annually by Westminster Interfaith.

LECTURES

Lectures, often organised in conjunction with SACRE, have been delivered by distinguished religious leaders and scholars:

1986 Dr. Zaki Badawi (Muslim) on "Education in a Multi-Faith Society".

- 2000 Clive Lawton (Jewish) on "The Rise and Movement of Faiths".
- 2001 Indarjit Singh (Sikh) on "The Sikh Religion and its Response to Life in the 21st Century".
- 2002 Dr. Fahim (Muslim) on "The Happy Family in Islam".
- 2003 The Honourable Barnabas Leith (Baha'i) on Building One World".
- 2005 Rev. Dr. John Polkinghorne (Christian) on "The Friendship of Science and Religion" in conjunction with the Church of St John the Evangelist, Stanmore
- 2007 Dr. Vinod Kapashi (Jain) on "The Jain Declaration on Nature".
- 2008 Venerable Archdeacon Treweek (Christian) on "My Role in Inter Faith affairs as Archdeacon of Northolt".



Representatives of Harrow's faiths in Harrow's Council Chamber

VIGILS AND PRAYERS FOR PEACE

Inter Faith Vigils and Prayers for Peace have brought our faith communities together on many occasions.

1991 Following a briefing by Canon Rafiq Farah, a Palestinian Arab from the Christian community, and Mr. Mohsin Jaffer, from the Muslim community, on the Gulf crisis of 1991, a Vigil of Prayers and Readings for Peace was held on 14th February 1991. An anthology of the prayers and readings used on that occasion was compiled and illustrated by children from Harrow schools.

This vigil was followed by a similar event on 24th March 1991 at the Navat Bhavan Temple on the occasion of the Hindu Festival of Rama Navani.

1994 Since the beginning of 1994 vigils and prayers for peace have been a regular event in HIFC's calendar, sometimes held jointly with other groups, sometimes taking the form of a chain of prayer in which members have undertaken to set aside a period of time to pray or meditate for peace, either at home, at work or at a place of worship.

1998 On 31st January the vigil of prayers for peace was held in conjunction with the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

2007 On 27th January the vigil was held at Harrow Central Mosque, which Mary Hale describes in an article published by the Harrow Observer entitled "A Moment of True Peace"

“On Thursday last week a group of 30 people gathered to pray together for peace. The meeting was arranged by Harrow Inter Faith Council and hosted by Harrow Central Mosque. Contributions to the prayers and reflections came from Muslims, a Hindu, a Zoroastrian, members of the Jewish faith, a Buddhist, several Christians and a Baha’i. After the prayers a very moving incident demonstrated the human compassion and caring which contributes so much towards good relations and peace between the many different faith communities in Harrow. Mr Muhammad Yacub, a member of the mosque, expressed his joy at the presence of Professor Norman Kember. Mr Yacub warmly embraced Mr Kember, declaring Mr Kember’s presence to truly be a miracle and saying his prayers had been answered. The meeting concluded with an opportunity to chat and make friends over refreshments kindly offered by the mosque.”

2009 This year HIFC has co-operated with the Mayor’s Office in organising a Service for the victims of the Mumbai bombings and on Sunday 25th January, together with the Muslim Council of Britain, Middlesex New Synagogue and Councillor Navin Shah, London Assembly Member for Brent and Harrow, we organised a gathering to pray for all those who have lost their lives and those who have suffered and continue to suffer in the on-going conflicts in the Middle East. The meeting was conducted in an atmosphere of good-will and friendship. We have the firm intention to organise another such gathering in the Autumn, embracing all conflict areas in our war-torn world.

CELEBRATIONS OF FAITH AND EXHIBITIONS

HIFC’s most high-profile events have been a series of Celebrations of Faith and exhibitions. These events have catered for pupils and students from Harrow schools and colleges, combined with evening sessions for the general public; they have encompassed work-shops, discussions, lectures, competitions and panels of inter faith speakers to answer questions. Usually these sessions have concluded with a celebratory meal.

- 1986 The first of these events, under the title “A Festival of Faith” was held at the Teachers’ Centre, 10th-14th March 1986. About 650 students and 200 adults attended this event.
- 1986 From 15th September – 6th October 1986 an Exhibition on the subject of “Religious Buildings as an Expression of Faith” was held at Gayton Library.
- 1989 3rd – 4th May, a Celebration of Faith focussing on story and legend was held at Whitmore high School. Over 1,000 first and middle school pupils attended this event.
- 1990 Coinciding with One World Week on 17th – 18th October 1990 a celebration of faith on the theme of “Festival, Food and Fasting” was held in the Hall of the Teacher’s Centre. This celebration included a display of dances for Diwali by Kala Anjali Arts Circle.
- 1991 Again in connection with One World Week a celebration was held at Gayton High School. On this occasion the theme was “Growing in the Faith”, focussing on initiation and rites of passage. The evening concluded with an evening vigil of prayers and readings on mercy and suffering.
- 1992 The Celebration of Faith, 14th-15th October 1992, held at Harrow Museum and Heritage Centre, dealt with the journeys of our faiths and their followers from their countries of origin to this London suburb.
- 2000 The 2000 Exhibition, 4th October – 3rd December, again at the Heritage Centre, looked forward to the new millennium. The theme was “Faiths together for the Future”.

2003 On 29th March 2003 “Spring for Peace”, an exhibition and workshops with a concert of music, drama, readings and dance by young people up to the age of 18 on ideas about peace, was held at Harrow Baptist Church.

2004 In connection with the borough’s 50th anniversary celebrations, a week-long “Festival of Faiths in Harrow” was held 24th June – 4th July. This included visits to local places of worship and an open-air inter faith celebration in St Ann’s Road.

20th November saw one of our most colourful events when children and adults presented “A Festival of Lights”, a joint celebration of Diwali, Hanukkah, Christmas and other religious festivals falling at the end of the year at St. Ann’s Shopping Centre, in the presence and with the participation of the Mayor, Councillor Lurline Champagnie. Pat Stevens described the atmosphere in an article at the time.

“On Saturday 20th November a great crowd, wearing celebratory dress of all kinds, gathered at the statue of skipping Katie to meet the Mayor, who led a procession along St Ann’s Road into St Ann’s Centre for the Festival of Lights. This was organised to look back to Diwali and Eid, to look forward to Channukah and Christmas and to give all faiths a chance to celebrate the light of understanding. I think I spotted an elephant among the Hindu children. There was dancing, music, chanting, reading as young and old from our local Baha’I, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian communities proclaimed their faith, their visions and their hopes for the people of Harrow. The Jain children danced around a glittering silver pole. Children of Trinity Church Harrow set up a Christmas tableau complete with stable and manger, while real wise men (Zoroastrian ones) swept down the escalator dressed in priestly robes with their distinctive hats, to present their gifts to Jesus and to say a prayer of thanksgiving in Avesta, the very language that would have been spoken by the Magi. St John’s Greenhill Gospel Choir inspired everyone to join in “This Little Light of Mine – Oh let it shine” and Harrow Young Musicians played a splendid finale from the food hall gallery. A celebratory event to light up Harrow.”

Festival of Lights November 2004



CONFERENCES

- 1993 On 21st November 1993 a conference for parents, teachers and faith communities on "Spirituality and Morality" was held at the Teachers' Centre.
- 2007 "What's it all About?" This day conference, at Harrow Arts Centre, allowed students in years 10, 11 and 12 (ages 14 - 17) in Harrow High Schools to explore religious and philosophic questions that arise in every day life. About 250 students participated in 9 workshops. The conference concluded with a lively question and answer session.
- 2008 A similar day conference, this time exclusively for sixth formers, was organised and hosted by Park High School and held on 27th June 2008. HIFC members assisted with the planning and running of the conference.

OTHER ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

- 1993 In 1993 our contribution to One World Week took the form of a concert by children from Harrow Schools on the theme of "Festivals, Faith and Cultural Diversity", organised by Punitha Perinparaja.
- 1999 A Grand Reunion of members past and present, with a buffet lunch was held at St. Andrew's Church, South Harrow on Sunday 19th September.

PREMISES

From its earliest days HIFC has given support to faith communities seeking premises in which to accommodate worship, teaching, ceremonies, cultural and social meetings.

- 1985 On 12th September 1985 HIFC issued a press statement in support of the planning application for the building of a Hindu Temple on land at Northwick Park. Copies were sent to local MP's and to Brent and Harrow Borough Councils.
- 1988 HIFC undertook an enquiry into requirements for premises for worship by faith communities to be presented to Harrow Council. At its meeting on 10th November 1988 HIFC Executive Committee expressed its sadness and dismay at the problems being experienced by Bhaktivedanta Manor in its dealing with Hertsmere Council. It was agreed that a letter should go to the Secretary of State for the Environment urging that sympathy and imagination be used to find suitable sites for places of worship in overcrowded metropolitan areas.
- 1996 In March 1996 HIFC was offered, free of charge, the lease of 22 years on an old and fairly dilapidated hall-cum-hut situated by Stanmore Pond, with the stipulation that HIFC bring the hall into a usable condition and become responsible for the insurance and rates. Unfortunately due to a number of problems this project had, eventually, to be abandoned, but, at the time of writing we live in hope that we may soon acquire premises from which to function. Such an acquisition would enormously facilitate and enhance our work.

ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS

- 2005 We live in the real world and share its concerns. On 18th July 2005 we joined Harrow Sai School to celebrate their 10th anniversary with a presentation, "This is our planet. Let's save it", accompanied by Creation Dances.
- 2007 In 1997 we joined in two evenings of information and discussions on global warming and its possible consequences. On 10th June we watched a showing of Al Gore's film "An Inconvenient Truth" at Harrow Baptist Church and on 28th June we joined the Kol Chai Jewish community in a discussion on the same topic, led by David Wasdell of the Meridian Project.

ADDRESSING SENSITIVITIES

- 2004 In 2004 HIFC wrote to the Advertising Standards Authority protesting at irreverent and insulting portrayal of sacred personages and symbols in some advertisements.
- 2007 Through SACRE we have given advice to schools on religious sensitivities in such matters as dress, diet, sex education and the wearing of sacred symbols.

REFUGEES

- 1993 Many members of our faith communities came to this country as refugees and the plight of refugees has frequently figured in our discussions.
- 1993 In May 1993 a briefing on the situation of refugees, by Jill Rutter of the Refugee Council and the ensuing discussion led to the decision to send a letter to the Home Office expressing HIFC's concern at the plight of refugees, and a consideration of ways in which HIFC could help refugees in our borough.
- 1995 Again on 24th January 1995 HIFC discussed ways in which refugees arriving in Harrow could be helped. Some teacher members attended in-service training sessions concerning refugees in our borough's schools.
- 1996 At the AGM held on 11th July 1996, Mr. Adam Hasan, Refugee Worker, updated members on the local and national situation. He urged faith communities to lobby the government about the plight of refugees and to seek a change of policies.

PART-TIME FAITH WORKER

- 2005 In April 2005, Laurretta Johnnie was appointed by Harrow Association of Voluntary Service on behalf of Harrow Council to a newly created post of part-time Faith Worker on a one year contract. HIFC co-operated with Laurretta and participated in meetings which she organised. She was invited to join the Executive Committee of HIFC. Laurretta was subsequently appointed to work for the newly established West London Faith Forum.

STATEMENTS

- 2005 After the London bombings of 7th July 2005 HIFC issued a statement deploring the use of violence, "which the teachings of all our faiths and philosophies unambiguously condemn", and declaring that, "The recent events have made us even more determined to live together in a spirit of co-operation and support."
- 2006 HIFC issued the following statement in response to the appearance of objectionable cartoons portraying the Prophet Mohammed. "We abhor disrespectful references to religious figures and symbols, which enflame religious sentiments and arouse feelings of pain and disgust, in cartoons and advertisements. While advocating freedom of speech, we do not condone freedom of insult.

IN MEMORIAM

We remember with gratitude all those who gave devoted service to the cause of Harrow Inter Faith Council, but who, sadly, are no longer with us in this life. Among them we remember:

The Rev'd Hazel Whitehead (Christian), founding member of HIFC, who died 27/7/1993.

Mr. Manjeet Singh Selhi (Sikh), also a founding member, who died in 1992.

Mrs. Piloo Desai (Zoroastrian), whose death was announced to HIFC on 18/9/02.

Councillor D. Lavingia (Hindu), who died 23rd January 2008.

IN CONCLUSION

We live in a conflict-ridden world, but all of us in Harrow Inter Faith Council believe that problems can be solved not by violence, but through dialogue and deepening of understanding. It is not always easy, but the experience of 25 years convinces us of the truth of what faiths teach: that kindness, open-heartedness, respect and willingness to learn from each other is the path that leads to harmony at all levels of human relationships – in families, between communities and between nations. With the firm intention of continuing down that path we face the future in hope.



APOLOGIES

We apologise for any errors or omissions we may have made in this necessarily abbreviated review of 25 years activity.

*Thanks are due to:
The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe
for the use of their premises for the anniversary celebrations*

*The Community and Cultural Services, Harrow Council,
for their valued support in the organisation of the anniversary events*

*The Faith communities of Harrow
for inviting people of all faiths and beliefs to their places of worship*

*Past and present members of
Harrow Inter Faith Council (1984-2009)*

*Mr Mike Bishop[, whose meticulous record-keeping has enabled us to
access the information contained in this account of
Harrow Inter Faith Council's first 25 years.*

This publication was compiled by Mary Hale and Punitha Perinparaja
and edited by Pat Stevens