

**32nd
Annual
Multi-
Faith
Pilgrimage
for Peace**

**Saturday
20th May
2017**

**In
North
London
and
Hertford-
shire**

See Page 5

In Gratitude

Thanks to all, who have sent greetings for Christmas and New Year, including some early donations to the Newsletter.

Now in its 100th edition, the Newsletter was started by Alfred Agius 20 years ago, when he took over from Br Daniel Faivre, who founded Westminster Interfaith as an agency of the R.C. Diocese of Westminster in 1982 at the request of Cardinal Basil Hume. Daniel had been active in interfaith for many years before especially in South-all.

I thank both Alfred and Daniel for their enthusiasm and commitment to peace and dialogue, but also all those people of different faiths, who have supported us and enabled us to grow in faith and understanding. Sadly, Daniel left us in 2007 but his legacy of interreligious dialogue, friendship and prayer lives on in all our activities including the annual multi-faith pilgrimages which he started in 1986.

Daniel will be pleased to know that the quantity and quality of interfaith activities have increased significantly over the years and more people of all faiths and none are beginning to see the enormous value of

interreligious dialogue and cooperation at all levels of society as we stand together against hate crimes, all forms of injustice and discrimination, human trafficking, homelessness, poverty and lend our support to refugees and migrants. These activities bear witness to our growing sense of universal fraternity and unity, which our troubled world so clearly needs.

I thank God for having drawn me into this fascinating and exciting world of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue which allows me to meet so many wonderful people from all faith traditions both here and abroad. It is important that we maintain a global perspective in our multicultural, multi-ethnic, multiracial, multilingual and multi-faith society. We try to represent this dimension in our Newsletter including this bumper first issue of 2017.

We hope you will continue to support the publication of the Newsletter by sending us your subscription or donation to cover costs of printing and postage. With thanks in advance we remain united in prayer.

Jon

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50th World Day of Peace Message

2017 marks the 50th anniversary of the World Day of Peace message, which was instituted by Pope Paul VI in 1968 and is celebrated each year on the first day of January. The theme for this year's message is "*Nonviolence: a Style of Politics for Peace.*"

In the message, Pope Francis says that the Christian response to the many conflicts around the world must be one of nonviolence, which isn't passive, but active and has roots in a strong family life.

Piecemeal World War

Citing the wars and conflicts that marked the 20th century, Pope Francis pointed out that today "we find ourselves engaged in a horrifying world war fought piecemeal" with local conflicts, terrorism, organized crime, human trafficking and environmental degradation taking place throughout the world. To answer violence with violence leads "at best" to forced migration and the misuse of economic resources, and "at worst" to death, whether physical or spiritual, he said, stressing that "violence is not the cure for our broken world."

Jesus' Nonviolence

Jesus himself embraced a nonviolent response to the conflicts of his time. He taught his followers to love their enemies and to turn the other cheek. Quoting St Mark's Gospel, Pope Francis said that the true battlefield, where violence and peace meet is from within, from the human heart, where evil intentions come. Jesus' response is to walk the path of nonviolence up to the point of the cross, "whereby he became our peace and put an end to hostility

Jesus' command to love one's enemies "is rightly considered the *magna carta* of Christian nonviolence," and Pope Francis explained that it doesn't mean succumbing to evil, but rather responding to evil with good.

"For Christians nonviolence is not merely tactical behaviour but a person's way of being, the attitude of one who is so convinced of God's love and power that he or she is not afraid to tackle evil with the weapons of love and truth alone."

Disarmament

His message included a plea for disarmament, the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons and for an end to domestic violence and the abuse of women and children.

The Jesuit Pope mentioned several figures who were prime examples of nonviolence: Mahatma

Ghandi, Pashtun independence activist Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Martin Luther King Jr. He added that women are often leaders of nonviolence, pointing to Liberian activist Leymah Gbowee and the thousands of women in the country who through organized prayer events and nonviolent protests succeeded in prompting high-level peace talks to end the second civil war in Liberia. He also cited Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who affirmed in 1979, on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, that we don't need "bombs and guns" to bring peace, but rather to "get together (and) love one another." He also praised her ready availability toward everyone "through her welcome and defence of human life, those unborn and those abandoned and discarded."

Nonviolence in the Family

If the strategy of nonviolence is to grow, it must begin in the family, the Pope said, explaining that the family "is the indispensable crucible" in which all members of the family "learn to communicate and to show generous concern for one another, and in which frictions and even conflicts have to be resolved not by force but by dialogue, respect, concern for the good of the other, mercy and forgiveness."

The love lived within the family radiates to the whole of society, he said, adding that "an ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence between individuals and among peoples cannot be based on the logic of fear, violence and closed-mindedness, but on responsibility, respect and sincere dialogue."

The Beatitudes

Pope Francis closed his message by pointing to the Beatitudes as a program for political and religious leader, heads of international institutions, businesses and media executives to follow in exercising their responsibility.

He concluded by praying that, in 2017, people would continue to build peace daily through "small gestures and acts" and that "we dedicate ourselves prayerfully and actively to banishing violence from our hearts, words and deeds, and to becoming nonviolent people and to building nonviolent communities that care for our common home."

The Pope ended his message with the appeal he made at the interfaith gathering in Assisi in September last year: "Nothing is impossible if we turn to God in prayer. Everyone can be an artisan of peace."

I am the Way – Revisited (Part 3)

Leafing through Genesis, thoughts come to my mind. How did the writers of Genesis, or rather those who heard the story or myth which was later committed to writing, obtain this information? Was the story of the fashioning of Adam and Eve from existing matter (dust of the earth, a rib from Adam's side to fashion Eve?) and then God breathing "into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being" (Gen 2:7) taken from existing civilizations in the Middle East? There is a striking similarity between hearing and committing to memory in Hinduism in the Vedic tradition of *sruti* and *smrithi* (hearing and remembering) by the *rishis*. The dating of Genesis seems quite some time late since intelligent human beings roamed the planet. Has God spoken only to Adam and Eve and their direct descendants? The Bible speaks of Yahweh's relations with peoples other than the Israelites e.g. the Philistines (1). Is the present world population descended from one single couple? How can we be sure? Are we to ignore the findings of science? Evolutionary biologists haven't a clue when human beings first appeared. Our only clues are fossils and stone tools about six million years old, found in Africa. Ancestors of modern humans seem to have appeared about two million years ago in East Africa. Our closest living relatives are the chimpanzees with whom we share almost 99% of our genes. But this tiny difference makes us so far removed from apes. Was there a moment in time when the "spiritual" emerged, God directly intervening in the existing order? Again my inquisitive, presumptuous and cheeky self, strains at the leash: Why does God not tell us plainly his plan for us? Perhaps (s)he wants us to have the satisfaction of finding it out by ourselves, just as he gives us the ability to be explorers of the universe, both of the microcosm, the latent energy in the sub-atomic world and the macrocosm, how it all started with the big bang theory about 14 billion years ago, endowing us with a mind to find all this by ourselves, to be somehow co-creators with Him. Beset by questions like these and appealing to my reasoning faculties I often turn to my faith and find refuge in it. In Matthew's gospel (8:23-27) we read that a violent storm on the lake threatened the life of the apostles while Jesus slept peacefully next to them. The apostles were furious that while they were all but drowning, Jesus seemed unconcerned. On being woken up, Jesus just said "Why are you so frightened, you men of little faith?"(2)

From a Christian perspective, the history of salvation started to be known by human beings through God's communication and men's response. It is

thought that language as we know it today developed some 40,000 years ago, a step forward known as "the great leap forward". We are told in the Bible that Adam and Eve talked to each other and to God. Was God talking in human language? It is all very mysterious. This is important if we are to get some understanding of the Bible and its contents. What do we mean when we say that the Bible is the Word of God? Perhaps it is more accurate if we say that the Bible is the Word of God in the words of men. The inspirational nature of the writing of the Bible, putting into human words the transcendent reality of God, eternal and infinite, remains a mystery. Church teaching e.g. the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of Vatican II states: Holy Mother Church accepts.....the Books of the Old and New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts.....they have God as their author" (*Dei Verbum. No 11*). The document DI clarifies that these books "firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scripture" (ibid, 26). Any detail, therefore that is not necessary for our salvation (and these are many) has no guarantee of historical truth or inerrancy. The New Testament is a collection of faith documents of the early Christian communities. In the first two verses of his Gospel Luke tells us that there have been 'many accounts' of the life of Jesus. We find different versions of the same event, with additions or omissions as seemed fit to the compilers, all Christians believe, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Scripture scholars have thrown invaluable light on the texts and contexts to help readers and believers understand the Gospel message. I came to appreciate and love the Bible rather late in life, after my priestly ordination. Among the bits I am still not clear are statements like 'the Father is greater than the Son' (Jn 14:28), or that the Son does not know when the world is coming to an end (Mt 24:36). Critics who miss the nature of the holy books or who are out to discredit them miss the core message of the Bible and think they have a field day. They do, in fact, miss the wood for the trees.

Footnotes

(1) Amos: 9.7. Also Ps 97:6 "All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God".

(2) Soren Kierkegaard's words come to mind: "Talk to me with your silence. Heavenly Father, you talk to us in many ways. You talk also when you are silent, because the one who is silent also speaks to test one's beloved. The one who keeps silent also talks, so that when we understand what God is

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I am the Way – Revisited (Part 3)

Continued from page 3

telling us, it will be more intimate, when we become aware of it. Give us, while we are waiting for you, the consolation to know that you keep silent out of love, that you guide us by your voice, that you teach us by your silence.”

It may be argued that, strictly speaking, *Dominus Iesus* is not a document that adds anything new to the

Church's teaching. It is a *Declaratio*, a statement by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith on the Church's position regarding the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church which Pope John Paul II saw, approved and ordered to be published.

Alfred Agius

19th November : Inter Faith Week

19th November is an easy day to remember. It was my mother-in-law's birthday. She was born 19/11/1911. We celebrated her 100th birthday in 2011. She died in 2012.

19th November this year was the penultimate day in Inter Faith Week and the Zoroastrian Centre held an all-day centenary event to commemorate the role of the Indian Soldier during the First World War.

It was a chilly but glorious Saturday. Overground and underground trains were packed with happy shoppers and tourists from all over the world. While I stood there watching fellow passengers, I was struck by the uniqueness of everybody and remembered Brother Daniel Faivre's description of human beings. He called each person a UMG: a Unique Manifestation of the Godhead. That's fine if you believe in a Creator God and even if one does not, we all agree we are pretty unique even in the way we dress. On my way to Rayners Lane and on the return journey, the only English I heard spoken were train and stations announcements. Around me people were speaking a variety of European and Asian languages. Young children were happily switching from one language to another to speak to their parents or guardians of different nationalities. It was fascinating!

At Baker Street, I changed underground line and found a seat and took out a little 40 page booklet I found while sorting out my interfaith bookshelves at work: *Muhammad and the Sultan*. It had been written by an Italian Franciscan monk in 1975. It was badly translated, however it was interesting. The first part of the book was devoted to Louis Massignon and the author's encounter with him. Just 23 pages were devoted to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his relationship with Christianity and St Francis' encounter with Islam in Egypt at the court of Sultan Malik-al-Kamil. The book concludes with the following quote: "It is necessary before speaking to listen to the voice and more to the heart of man... it is necessary that we become brothers... the clime for dialogue is

friendship" (Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*). The quote was a good preparation for the event I was about to attend.

The event was extremely well organized with lots of interesting and useful information punctuated with relevant stories, videos and inputs from politicians and religious leaders. Although titled 'The Indian Soldier in World War I', it actually included the role of soldiers from the British Empire and the Commonwealth. This made the event more interesting.

We live in a multicultural, multiethnic and multi-faith community rich in customs, traditions, language and history. Yet we seem to be unaware of the history of our immigrant communities who are now British. It is a serious omission because many grow up almost without roots and often with identity problems, because they do not know their history. The event, maybe unwittingly, sought to fill this gap.

Invoking the *fravashis* (guardian spirits) seemed to me a most appropriate way to open the event in the month of November, which we, Catholics, devote to the Holy Souls of our ancestors. It was also appropriate because we were remembering all those who lost their lives in WW1. Around 1.5 million Indians served during the war. They fought in France, East Africa, Mesopotamia, Gallipoli, Egypt and Palestine. About 74 000 lost their lives. Indian soldiers were awarded many medals for gallantry including 11 Victoria Crosses. But there were also many soldiers from around the Empire and the Commonwealth who fought for Britain during the War. I was particularly pleased to hear Seleena Carty speaking about the role of African and Caribbean soldiers and her passionate appeal not to forget them. I shall introduce the BlackPoppyRose to members of the Catholic Caribbean community, who have probably never heard of it. I learnt a lot that day. Of course, the food was great and it was a joy to mingle with friends old and new. Thank you for organizing such a splendid event.

The Shi'i World

A wonderful evening was held at the Ismaili Centre for the launch of *The Shi'i World: Pathways in Tradition and Modernity*. The welcome is always exceptional. Everyone is greeted personally and assigned a volunteer who takes them to the reception and introduces them to the host and other guests. The presentation, discussion and conversations about how the various Shi'i Muslim communities express their faith was extremely enlightening. So many themes were discussed ranging from history, art and architecture to legal and moral traditions as well as devotional practices.

The authors, Farhad Daftary and Shainool Jiwa were very knowledgeable and entertaining. Seated comfortably on the stage, they did not give us lengthy lectures but answered pertinent questions about the Shi'i world put to them by Dr Russell from Balliol College and from the audience. We participated in these conversations and learnt a lot without too much effort because everything was explained clearly orally and visually. There was a screen on which were projected images of art and architecture.

The discussion on the Fatimids was particularly interesting. They gained power in North Africa in

909, mainly in Algeria and Tunisia then ruled for over 200 years in Egypt—the only Shi'a group to rule in Egypt. According to the speakers, their approach to governance and pluralism was marked by a high degree of tolerance, fairness and justice in a very diverse society composed mainly of Coptic Christians and Jews. The Fatimids established courts of law, which apparently were more favourable to women on a variety of issues, including inheritance, consequently many women preferred to use the Shi'a courts rather than the Christian or Jewish courts which also existed.

The Shi'i world is made up of many groups with different practices yet all sharing fundamental Islamic beliefs and traditions. Each group has its own story and tends to be dominant in certain areas of North Africa and the Middle East: Alevis in Turkey, Alawis in Syria, Ibadis in Oman, Druze in Lebanon and so on. If you want to find out more about the Shi'i world, the book is available from the Ismaili Centre.

As usual, there was the opportunity to take part in a guided visit of this beautiful Centre.

32nd Annual Multi-Faith Pilgrimage for Peace

Like last year, we have decided to hold our pilgrimage in May rather than in the first or second weekend in June in order to avoid Ramadan, when Mosques and the Muslim community will be very busy. Ramadan starts on Saturday 27th May. Our pilgrimage takes place on Saturday 20th May.

As we will be visiting places of worship in North London and in Hertfordshire we shall be using coaches to take us from one place of worship to another. Apart from a couple of places in North London, which are within walking distance of each other, the venues in Hertfordshire are quite far apart and not that easy to reach by either public transport or on foot.

So far, we have arranged to visit the Jain Temple, near Potters Bar, Bhaktivedanta Manor (Hindu Temple) near Hemel Hemstead, a Gurdwara, a Mosque, a RC Church and Centre for Spirituality in North London. We also hope to fit in a brief visit to the Shoghi Effendi Memorial. Shoghi Effendi Rabbání was the Guardian and appointed head of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 until his death in 1957. The memorial stands tall in the Bahá'í part of New Southgate Cemetery. It would be good to stop and pay our respects on 60th anniversary of his death.

Because we are hiring coaches, it will be necessary to book and pay for a seat, which we reckon will be around £12 to £15, which is not bad when you consider that a one day travel card in London costs £12.30 (£11.50 if you use Oyster).

We are considering two starting and ending points: Watford Junction Station and Arnos Grove, where there are reasonably good parking facilities. Fuller details and booking form will be available in the next issue towards the end of March or early April. In the meantime, it would be useful to know where is most convenient place to start for participants. Do let us know.

Make a note in your diary. Keep the date free.

32nd Annual MultiFaith Pilgrimage for Peace
Saturday 20th May 2017 Time: 9am - 6pm
North London and Hertfordshire

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Year of the Rooster



2017 is the Year of the Fire Rooster. The Chinese New Year of the Rooster is from Jan. 28, 2017 to Feb. 15, 2018. Rooster is the tenth in the 12-year cycle of Chinese zodiac sign. Years of the Rooster include 1933, 1945,

1957, 1969, 1981, 1993, 2005, 2017, 2029

Rooster is almost the epitome of fidelity and punctuality. For ancestors who had no alarm clocks, the crowing was significant, as it could awaken people to get up and start to work. In Chinese culture, another symbolic meaning of chicken is exorcising evil spirits.

Chinese New Year, or Spring Festival, is the grandest and most important annual event for Chinese people - a time for whole families to reunite. The festival lasts for 15 days from the 1st to 15th day of the first lunar month. Most employees will have seven days off work, while students take one month off school.

Celebrations in London are the largest outside Asia. Chinatown becomes a riot of colours and activities. Red is the key colour of Chinese New Year. It's supposed to bring good luck for the coming year. Everyone is welcome to join in.

Here are a couple of ways of wishing Happy New Year in Chinese: "Xin Nian Kuai Le" (Mandarin) or "San Nin Faai Lok" (Cantonese).

Correspondence from Issue 98

On Religious Festivals

Thank you for a most informative newsletter. I fear however that you have not become aware of a change in the calendar of the Baha'i Faith. The Baha'i calendar has altered so that the two Holy Days - the Birth of Baha'ullah and the Birth of The Bab are now treated as one pair of days that moves with the lunar calendar within the months of October and November. This year they will be celebrated on November 1 and 2. I was also interested to read the item about the Ahmaddi community, as this is the same claim and message of peace and unity as that of Baha'ullah (1817-1892) whose declaration in Baghdad in 1863 is celebrated by the Baha'is in April each year. *Nottingham Inter Faith Council*

On Fact and Fiction

I think it is important to make a distinction between true scientifically investigated miracles and "Paul Daniel" type magical trick stories. Why mention the milk-drinking Hindu statues' story in your last Newsletter? Has this story been scientifically investigated? I doubt it. Confusion concerning miracles is dangerous. It encourages relativism, a curse in our increasingly atheistic world.

Do we want Richard Dawkins' point of view or a belief in Jesus Christ, his crucifixion and resurrection? We can't have it both ways. What is the truth? What is fact? What is fiction? Many people get influenced in the wrong direction by entertaining stories. With the love of Jesus Christ, yours sincerely,
Elizabeth Elton

From the Islamic Community in Italy

Ringrazio per questo gentile messaggio e ricambio con la trasmissione in allegato di una dichiarazione interreligiosa a sostegno dei migranti condivisa dal

JRS, il Servizio Internazionale per i Rifugiati dei Gesuiti, e la COREIS Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana. Il documento è stato presentato alle Nazioni Unite in occasione della Giornata Internazionale per la Pace. Un cordiale saluto,
COREIS Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana
(See Page for a summary in English)

On Brother Daniel and Brother John

Merci beaucoup de Interfaith que je lis avec grand plaisir et intérêt. Ci-joint la biographie de mon très cher ami Daniel. Une erreur s'est glissée : Daniel n'était pas directeur de Holy Trinity School à Welwyn Garden City, mais responsable de l'enseignement religieux. Je me ferai un devoir et une joie d'être à Southall le 7 septembre 2017.

Après une lourde chute en juillet, Bro John a passé un mois à Ealing hospital, puis a séjourné à St David's Nursing home comme patient en fauteuil roulant, avec un langage peu compréhensif. A la suite d'une chute récente où il s'est cassé la hanche, il est de nouveau hospitalisé à Ealing hospital. Je lui ai rendu visite 3 semaines en mars, 2 semaines en mai, une semaine en septembre durant laquelle j'ai vidé sa maison qui doit être mise en vente. Avec mon amitié. *Bro Jo*

From different faith groups

Thank you so much for sending the Westminster Interfaith Newsletter for me. I appreciate it very much and this is useful for our community. With kind regards. *Ven. Seelawimala*

Thank you for sending me a most interesting newsletter. Penny and I are travelling to Israel at the end of October on a visit organised by Council of Christians and Jews. We shall

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Correspondence from Issue 98

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be away for 7 days and I will send you a summary of the visit. Among the Jewish sites we will also be visiting Bethlehem and Nazareth. Best wishes, *Basil*

Thank you very much! Best wishes! Shinmeizan Centre for Interreligious Dialogue, Japan

Congratulations on another fine Newsletter. I've even sent a copy of it to a friend of mine in Austria, a paediatric doctor who travels all over the world helping people. Today I also received a copy through the mail. I'll try and find a good home for it but I don't need it. (*Father*) *Francis*

From Alfred

I am responding to your last issue of the newsletter rather late as I wanted to read as much of it as I could. It is indeed a bumper issue but I also think it is a landmark of your publishing career. It is the ideal publication I always dreamt of but never quite succeeded in achieving. It is rich and varied in its contributors, its content, current news, history, some humour, forthcoming events and the religious calen-

dar as well as my little, even if unduly long, bit of interreligious dialogue related theology. I hope this latter is not just a waste of space! So, well done indeed. *Alfred*

On Alfred's Article

I would love to have the full text of Alfred Agius' essay on the "Way" if it's not too much trouble.

This is an issue which perplexes me as a Christian and I don't think I can wait for 5 editions of the newsletter!! Thanks v much for your hard work in putting the newsletter together – it's always thought provoking, comforting and inspirational. With love and peace, *Secretary, Religions for Peace UK*

First, thank you for the Interfaith Newsletter, issue 98. It really is an interesting document. Yes please I should very much like you to send me the electronic version mentioned on page 3; I am impatient and would like to read the rest without awaiting further newsletters! *Pat*

What I Felt as Calais Burned

I only spent a few days in Calais each time, but what struck me as I walked the camp, alone or with a resident or with a fellow volunteer, was the civility of it.

Yes there were reports of bad people, there always are in a group of 10,000 people but as I was only there a short time, I saw none of this. No one leered at me, jeered at me, hassled me or begged. No one demanded, shouted or made me feel uncomfortable. I didn't get that on my walk to work this morning or even on my jog this evening.

What I got instead was offers of tea, coffee, warm milk, food, a chat, a tour, someone to make sure I was safe, not lost, a story, a photo of a child, a drawing.

I didn't see tribal factions, or bludgers. What I saw was combined industry of Afghans, the hospitality of the Sudanese, the humility of Eritreans, combined with what must be what they describe as blitz spirit of the British, the indefatigable energy of volunteers, the resourcefulness of people who live in a less consumerist, less disposable culture than ours who made gardens, grew tomatoes, planted marigolds in empty tin cans, made raised beds, planted herbs, created stoves, constructed shops, created economies selling one cigarette, a bit of sugar. And despite at times being in muck so foul I gaged, it was the flowers in tin cans, the beautiful paintings on chipboard, the

attention in making you a decent cup of tea that stood in my mind. So much so that I couldn't help but think wouldn't it be amazing if the world could live more like this. (More toilets and taps) but the same communal sharing, caring, giving, not taking more than we need, sense of community.

Maybe I am naive. Maybe I saw something in that camp or the people in it that was unique to me. But I feel like what we (society) have razed this week was more than just a collection of tents, caravans and chipboard, but a symbol of the rich potential of humanity, a symbol of people's determination that even when everything around them has been reduced to so little, they will always strive for something better.

I can only hope that the people who are now dispersed across France find the spirit to continue spreading their humanity and determination into where ever they now are. I know they have spread it in my heart and it will forever change the way I look at my lot in life.

After spending time in Calais, I will always seek to plant flowers in what other people think is rubbish.

Rowena Harding

by kind permission of HANDS International

UK Faith Leaders Visit France

On Remembrance Sunday, people of all faiths stood in silence to mark the sacrifice of those who died fighting for this country. There is a greater recognition than ever of the role played by people of different faiths, including Islam in the World Wars of the last century.

But in the last few days another important gathering took place in remembrance of a more recent loss of life. Strengthening Faith Institutions Network organised a Civic and Faith Leaders Mission to France to commemorate the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13th November 2015 and in Normandy in July 2016.

The Mission to France started off with a visit to 'The Grand Mosque of Paris' where the contingent met with the Theological Director of the Paris Mosque, Sheikh Djelloul Seddiki. The group discussed the history of the mosque and how the Muslim community in Paris has been able to build bridges with the wider community. Reverend Nadim Nassar remarked that "this was an opportunity for the delegation to learn and look to apply some of the positive collaboration" particularly around stronger interfaith initiatives at a grass roots level.

The group also visited the church in the Normandy town of Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray, where the 85-year-old Catholic Priest Rev Jacques Hamel was brutally murdered. The delegation attended mass and assured the congregation that they stood in solidarity in this difficult time for the Catholic community. An open dialogue took place regarding the challenges that lie ahead and steps that need to be taken jointly. One of the youngest members of the delegation Dawood Masood reflected that "members of the delegation and the clergy were resolute not to let terrorists dictate the course of history and divide communities".

One of the focal points of the trip was the visit to the Bataclan theatre to pay their respects. Amina Inoles stated that "pain, grief, disbelief and horror were the emotions that enclosed us all – Muslims and Christians – whilst standing outside the Bataclan theatre".

London Is One

#LondonIsOne is another initiative aimed at consolidating racial, ethnic and interreligious harmony in and around London. It came about in response to two recent events: the murderous attack on the Mosque in Quebec while Muslims were at prayer, which resulted in the death and injury of many

The Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF – Conseil Représentatif des Institutions juives de France), also met the delegation and spoke about their experiences (including the attack on the kosher supermarket).

This mission to France allowed the group to ponder the successful coexistence taking place here in the UK and the importance of showing solidarity with the various French communities. The commemoration of the Paris attacks, Remembrance Sunday and the start of Interfaith Week all fell on the same day.

A small group of faith leaders also travelled to France on Remembrance Sunday to visit the graves of fallen soldiers of World War 1. The group highlighted unique stories like that of a Jewish soldier buried amongst the graves of over a hundred Muslim soldiers from the colonies, whilst behind are a number of Christian tombs.

With these sorts of initiatives, the delegation hopes to engage effectively with those of other faiths and none, as well as reaffirm the message of solidarity and co-existence that was reiterated throughout the trip. This week, as always, Faith Forums stands with anyone who stands for unity.

The Mission to France was made up of sixteen Christian and Muslim Civic, Faith Leaders and Interfaith Activists.

I was pleased to have helped set up the visit to Rouen and meet members of the community over there, including Father Pierre Belhache, the priest responsible for Catholic-Muslim relations in the diocese. The day before I met him, a Muslim delegation from Canada came to Rouen to pay their respects and a few days later another delegation came from Al-Azhar University in Cairo, followed shortly after by the delegation from London.

These interfaith visits across national boundaries may seem insignificant but they are extremely useful in strengthening Christian-Muslim relations and standing in solidarity against any form of violence.

faithful and President Donald Trump's executive order to ban Muslims from seven countries.

#LondonIsOne is one of many interreligious hashtag initiatives that have materialised in recent years. Unfortunately, I'm not a social media practitioner. I find it hard enough to

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London Is One

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keep up with telephone calls, emails and snail mail. However, Twitter, Facebook and other forms of instant media are a very powerful means of communicating to hundreds, if not thousands of users simultaneously. These means are a force for both good and bad. They were used most effectively by gangs during the riots in London and elsewhere a few years ago. More recently, there was a St Nicholas Day initiative, launched by London Church Leaders in the lead-up to Christmas: **#LondonUnited**. This initiative was aimed at raising awareness around the growing refugee crisis and the reports of increased harassment and abuse perpetrated towards immigrant communities. It was a call by Christian leaders to recognize and celebrate our collective responsibility as Londoners by coming together as neighbours and fellow citizens across all boundaries of class, religion and ethnicity. I'm pleased to report that leaders, organizations and communities of all faiths supported the initiative.

Today's initiative, on Friday 3rd February, was called the day before by Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner, Senior Rabbi to Reform Judaism, who said: "This week started with President Trump's executive order, and is ending with news that anti-semitism is at record levels in the U.K. Tomorrow, we will show our determination, as minorities and people of different religions, to stand together and protect one another."

Somehow, the call got through to many people to meet at the Wightman Road Mosque in Hornsey at 11.45am in order to stand in solidarity with Muslims as they came to worship for Midday Prayers. Representatives of most faiths were present, but the majority were Jews and Christians, which included local pastors from various churches, even the Bishop of Edmonton, who came with his crozier. We stood side by side around the Mosque with hands joined as a mark of solidarity and protection while the Muslim faithful prayed. Of course, the police, local councillors, photographers and reporters were also there. Some of us stayed on for the second prayer session to listen to the sermon and interact afterwards with the local Muslim community over some refreshments.

The event demonstrated that Londoners of all religious persuasions and none stand together against all forms of injustice, intolerance and discrimination as well as support and celebrate the beautiful diversity of its people. We are all members of one human family. When one member is attacked and wounded all members suffer. When one member is honoured all are honoured. London is and must remain a beacon of racial harmony whatever the circumstances.

The event was supported by: Reform Judaism, Islamic Society of Britain, Christian Muslim Forum, Faiths Forum for London, Hope not Hate. Each had an opportunity to speak and there was a message of support from the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan.

On the Casey Report

On the day, the Casey Report was published, I was contacted by an Italian journalist, who wanted to know my reactions to its contents. Well, I had not read it, so I could not comment. The reporter got in touch with one of our friends from Wightman Road Mosque, Bibi Khan, who wrote:

"From our perspective I have to say I was a little disappointed with some aspects of the report. I totally understand the link between extremism and the Muslim Faith but I do not agree with the implication that because elderly parents [mothers] don't speak English then how can they be properly integrated into the community.

Does that not exist in every race, ethnicity where people have populated areas because of safety, cultural and the feeling that they are with others who would understand their ways and culture? It is not

new for decades this has been the practice – Brixton and Tottenham were mainly Afro-Caribbean, Soho is mainly Chinese, Luton, Tower Hamlets – Asians, Stamford Hill and Golders Green mainly people of the Jewish Faith. In every group of people there are elderly parents or grandparents who do not speak English – why is this portrayed negatively for just this group of people.

The problem here is the report is trying to criticise every aspect of a Muslims life and upbringing. I am aware of the need to understand where issues are arising leading to terrorist acts but to highlight the routine and daily life of one group of mainly peace loving people in a negative manner bearing in mind the global feelings of prejudice and hatred for people of different ethnicity with give rise to more Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism."

Catholic Bishops Condemn US Travel Ban

It's not only Londoners, who have expressed solidarity with the Muslim community and deep concern over religious freedom issues that President Donald Trump's refugee ban raises. There has been an outcry around the world, especially in the USA, where thousands came out to demonstrate against Trump's executive memorandum of 27th January banning entry to the States from refugees from certain countries. For many, this memorandum was clearly aimed at keeping Muslims out.

The chairmen of three US bishops' Committees responded stating that the 'has generated fear and untold anxiety among refugees, immigrants and others throughout the faith community in the United States'. 'In response... we join with other faith leaders to stand in solidarity again with those affected by this order, especially our Muslim sisters and brothers.

'We also express our firm resolution that the order's stated preference for 'religious minorities' should be applied to protect not only Christians

where they are a minority, but all religious minorities who suffer persecution, which includes Yezidis, Shia Muslims in majority Sunni areas, and vice versa,' said the statement by the Bishop of Springfield, Massachusetts, Mitchell Rozanski; the Archbishop of Baltimore, William Lori; and the Bishop of Las Cruces, New Mexico, Oscar Cantu.

Our own Bishop Paul McAleenan, who noted that the ban was issued on Holocaust Memorial Day, said 'Those who have the welfare of all humanity, especially refugees, at heart, must continue to let President Trump know that his protectionist policies are not the way forward. These policies do not correspond with the rest of the world's attempt to alleviate the hardship of those who are long familiar with violence, fear and impoverishment.

'One of the principles of Catholic social teaching is solidarity and the promotion of peace. Never was there a better time to proclaim it. Those who believe in it will feel obliged to oppose President Trump's policies, the proposed wall between Mexico and the US, and now the travel ban.'

The Priest, the Rabbi and the Imam

As part of the Year of Mercy, Father Christian decided to hold an interfaith event in his parish.

He invited a Rabbi, an Imam and a Catholic priest to come together and share the understanding of mercy in their faiths.

The parish hall was packed. Light refreshments were available. There was a buzz in the hall. People were chatting. A couple of technicians from the Muslim community were setting up equipment to film and record the event, others young Muslims were mixing and chatting with the local predominantly Catholic audience and a few were praying in an alcove.

Fr Christian welcomed everybody and introduced the speakers. The Catholic priest spoke first. He gave a thorough presentation of mercy in the Church's teaching and tradition, which included a lot of Catholic Social Teaching.

The Rabbi spoke next and invited us to open our Bibles at Genesis Chapter 22. Nobody had a Bible, so he suggested we take out our I-phones and find the text. Some did. While we were looking for the text, the Rabbi said that the Bible was not just for reading but we needed to live it.

We did not need the Bible because the Rabbi because the Rabbi talked us through the chapters from God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac to Isaac's meeting with Rebekah and Abraham's death and burial by Isaac and Ishmael. In order to illustrate God's love and mercy, he shared other stories from survivors of the Holocaust and from his own experiences.

It was the Imam's turn to speak. He stood up recited the first verses of the Qur'an and referred to the 99 names of God. Pearls of Islam, a sufi music group, accompanied him and got the audience to participate in some of their songs, which all focused on the love of God. They were simple joyful songs, which most people were happy to join in singing. There was even one based on a Jimmy Cliff melody. The singer was Jamaican.

We had a break for refreshments followed by a very interesting exchange of questions and answers interspersed with more happy songs from Pearls of Islam.

It was a joyful and fulfilling event. Many myths and prejudices were dispelled that evening. May there be many more similar events in all parishes.

Look on the Bright Side

The media regularly feeds us with a diet of bad, often very sad and worrying news: wars, violence, natural and man-made disasters, scandals and so on, but, occasionally, there are some happy positive items of news that make one smile and help us look on the bright side of life.

Flicking through the newspapers in October and November last year, amidst the many incidences of racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic hate crimes, there were some glimmers of hope in the reporting of a number of heartwarming articles, which all included people of faith. There was the one about a Rabbi, an Imam, a Bishop and a Hindu leader, who were collecting food in North London to help feed the homeless and those in need. It included a picture of all four of them smiling while loading a van of goodies.

Then there was the article on the first global confer-

ence on faith and sport, which took place in the Vatican in October. It was attended by Pope Francis, Archbishop Justin Welby, Ban-Ki Moon and male and female representatives from Christian, Muslim, Jewish and other faiths. At the conference Tim Jahnigan was able to present his One World Ball, which, according to the inventor, is virtually indestructible and will last at least 30 years. Conference decided to back the global distribution of these balls so that every community in the world will be able to play a game of football on United Nations Peace Day on 21st September 2020 and every year after that.

There is more good news about; not enough space to include it all. If you have any positive stories and experiences of interfaith activities and events, please send them to us. Thank you.

Jasvir Singh OBE

We wish to congratulate Jasvir Singh, who has been awarded an OBE by Her Majesty the Queen for services to faith, interfaith communities and social cohesion in the UK. He thoroughly deserves it. We work closely with him. He is an excellent chairperson and a good friend.

Jasvir is the youngest Sikh in the world to currently hold this distinction. He is the founding Chair of City Sikhs, which was founded in October 2010 as a network for British Sikh professionals. Under his leadership, it has become one of the leading Sikh organisations in the country with over 6,000 individual members. City Sikhs deals with many of the diverse challenges facing modern Britain through a variety of projects, such as challenging hate crimes,

promoting youth and female empowerment, improving faith literacy in society, and developing collaborative interfaith initiatives.

The mission of City Sikhs is to create positive change in society, and it has established strong relationships with the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Christian communities throughout the UK to help achieve those aims.

As well as being an established barrister for the last decade, Jasvir is Chair of the British Sikh Report, an Associate of the St Paul's Institute, and a regular contributor on Radio 4's Thought for the Day. He is also Co-Chair of the Faiths Forum for London.

New Mosque in Mitcham

We congratulate the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community on the opening of a new Mosque in Mitcham. The World Head of the Community, the Fifth Khalifa (Caliph), His Holiness, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad inaugurated the Baitul Ehsan Mosque on 7 January 2017.

Upon arrival, His Holiness unveiled a commemorative plaque and offered a silent prayer in thanks to God Almighty. He then spoke to the local Ahmadi Muslims about the purpose of a Mosque, which is "to worship the One God, and so all those who come to worship in this Mosque should seek to fulfil this objective. Thus, Ahmadi Muslims should always pay full attention towards worship and fulfilling the obli-

gations owed to God Almighty."

His Holiness added: "As a result of building this Mosque, the local community will become more aware of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Hence, the local Ahmadi Muslims must fulfil the rights of their neighbours and inform the local people about the true peaceful teachings of Islam so that any fears or misconceptions that they may hold about Islam are removed. May Allah enable you all to do this."

After his address, His Holiness led the Zuhr and Asr prayers and inspected various facilities of the Mosque, which include the prayer halls, conference rooms and offices.

Mercy, Fraternity and Peace

On UN International Peace Day, during the Year of Mercy and Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, the Islamic Community of Italy (COREIS) and Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), delivered a joint statement to the United Nations on behalf of forced migrants, calling on all governments, religious institutions and people of good-will to work together in tackling the root causes of forced migration and provide protection for those fleeing from their homes, ensuring good reception conditions and access to adequate and affordable services. Robust policies are needed to counter racist and xenophobic tendencies – diversity must be recognized as an opportunity and a gift, not a threat.

War and persecution have driven more people from their homes than at any time since World War II, with over 65 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide, including over 21 million refugees, 3 million asylum-seekers and over 40 million internally displaced persons. Children represent a disproportionate number of displaced persons, accounting for nearly half of all refugees, amounting to 28 million refugee children total. An additional 20 million child migrants have fled their homes for a variety of reasons including extreme poverty or gang violence. According to JRS, there are many thousands of other displaced children at risk of human rights abuses throughout the world, especially in Syria and Afghanistan. In Eritrea, children on the move are at risk of forced military recruitment, of sexual abuse in Democrat-

ic Republic of Congo, of human or organ trafficking in Sudan, and of exploitative labor in Lebanon.

The criminal profits of the arms and ammunition industry, of human trafficking and smuggling, and political and judicial discrimination against migrants, are amongst the greatest evils of our contemporary world. These call for the active, effective, and coordinated work of Christians and Muslims to ensure all possible assistance to those suffering from them.

The statement declares that Muslims and Christians strive for a peace that is “beyond all understanding”, an experience of intimacy with the mystery of God, and of fraternal harmony with their neighbours. This Peace can be achieved when all recognize that we share a common home, and that we are invited by God to work together for the common good.

The pilgrim, the refugee, and the migrant, are all people who are searching, beyond hearth and home, for a place where they may encounter peace, be free of distress, and enjoy hospitality. Many forced migrants come from the Islamic and Christian traditions; they are in need of “not bread alone”, but also “the true word”: the spiritual consolation that is an experience of God’s mercy, fraternity among Christians and Muslims, among believers and nonbelievers; as sisters and brothers to discover a common Peace.

Hope for the Future

I thought the AGM was at the Faiths Forum for London (FF4L) office near Goodge Street, so that's where I headed. On the way, I checked my emails on the mobile and found that the meeting was at the Gurdwara Sikh Sangat in Bow. Of course, I got there late. The room was packed. Deputy Mayor of London, Sophie Linden had finished speaking and was answering questions from the floor on the Mayor's Police and Crime Plan.

The questions were focused and relevant. We were all concerned about the surge in hate crimes since the EU referendum as well as the security of people in religious premises. She re-assured us that these issues were high on Sadiq Khan's list of priorities.

What struck me, while I was listening to the questions and answers and noticed everyone behaving with courtesy, respect and kindness, was the sense of unity that existed between us, who represented a wide range of faiths and traditions. God was certainly in our midst.

The AGM followed as soon as Jasvar Singh arrived from his previous commitment. We reflected on the many events, projects and activities we'd been involved in this year. There were many positive things to share and congratulate ourselves on: projects on refugees; visits to the Calais 'Jungle' and Srebrenica in Bosnia; greater collaboration between faith groups, including a joint volunteering project between Caritas and JVS; a higher profile for the Faiths Forum due largely to the use of social media and many other activities.

Afterwards, we were invited to visit the beautiful Gurdwara and treated to some tasty refreshments in the *Langar* room, where we were able to meet other volunteers of the local Sikh community.

If these meetings represent signs of things to come then we are certainly walking along the path to a more united and harmonious society at least among people of faith.

From Br Daniel's Southall – The Town I love (5)

The Christian Church

The question is often asked: 'During this time when Southall has grown into a multifaith community, what has happened to the Christian Church?' In the latest issue of his church magazine, the vicar of John's Anglican Church, writes: 'The church, taken in its widest sense, is both stronger and weaker. Weaker in that certain churches have disappeared; the Salvation Army (two citadels), the Plymouth Brethren (two halls), the Congregational Church are no more. Add to that, in some denominations the number of priests and ministers is much reduced. But the Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic and various small churches remain – some of these are new.'

Among the newcomers, there is the Church of Salvation- originally founded in Sierra Leone, which worships in St George's; the Church of God of Prophecy, which worships in Holy Trinity; the Asian Christian Fellowship, which organizes an

inter-denominational service at St John's every Sunday afternoon. A Tamil Christian group meets at King's Hall. The establishment, multiplication and permanency of these churches and other groups which, on the whole, may be labelled as Pentecostal or evangelical, could be the subject of some challenging research. The increase in the number of Christian immigrants; the wish to worship in a more familiar language (although one notes in some well-established groups a movement towards the use of English); reaction against racism and what is seen as an adulteration of the message of the Gospel by some mainstream church; ethnic loyalty; theological rivalry between pastors: these are some of the factors that have helped in the creation of these groups. Like the non-Christian smaller groups these Christian communities have to rely on the support of others – usually the bigger and friendly churches – especially as regards premises.

Inter Faith Meeting for Christians Southall, 13th / 14th March

An overnight meeting (**13th/14th March 2017**) is being organised for Christians who have an active interest and experience in interfaith dialogue - the core of the attendees will be the local advisers on interfaith to the Catholic bishops.

This year, the invitation stretches to their counterparts in other churches, and to Catholics who are active in interfaith without having an official position.

The meeting will be in **Southall**, West London, and will provide an opportunity to exchange news about projects, visit an example of interfaith social action, experience the atmosphere and places of worship of a place that is saturated with various faiths, and to meet some of its residents.

If this sounds relevant to you, please contact Katharina as soon as possible at the Catholic Bishops' Conference: katharina.smith-muller@cbcew.org.uk

Courses, Lectures, Groups and Events

The Meditatio Centre

St Mark's, Myddelton Sq London EC1R 1XX
E: meditatio@wccm.org; T: 020 7278 20170

Thurs 23 February 6.30-9pm *Addiction and Grace* May Nicol

Sat 25 February 10.30-4pm *The Upanishads* Isabelle Glover

Wed 1 March 6.30-9pm *Beginning Lent* Laurence Freeman leading on to 6 week *Introduction to Christian Meditation* course

For full programme of retreats, talks and workshops, see website: www.meditatiocentrelondon.org

International Conference on Caste Discrimination

9th and 10th May 2017, 10am - 5pm, Amigo Hall, St George's Cathedral, London Rd, London SE1 6ER

Additional information on St Anselm's parish website: < <http://stanselmchurchsouthall.com/canacad/> >

Faiths In Tune faithsintune@gmail.com

21 May 2017 6th London Interfaith Music Festival at the British Museum

15/16 July 2017 2nd Berliner Festival der Religionen

Central London Inter Faith Meetup

Westminster Quaker Meeting House,
52 St Martins Lane WC2 N 4EA

Every Friday from 6.50pm website: <https://www.meetup.com/Central-London-Inter-Faith-Meetup>

Drop In Silence, 5.30-7pm Details: DropInSilence.org

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Courses, Lectures, Groups and Events

Continued from page 13

Christian Muslim Marriage Support Group

Star Centre at St Andrews, Fulham, London. Contact Rosalind or Heather confidentially through the inter faith marriage website: www.interfaithmarriage.org.uk

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/185782491456844/>

Open to all in a Muslim-Christian / inter faith relationship or family. Sunday afternoons 1.30-4.30 with refreshments . £5 contribution to cover expenses. **Next meetings: 19 February and 23 April**

Ammerdown Centre

Ammerdown Park, Radstock, Somerset, BA3 5SW7 Tel: 01761 433709 Fax 01761 433094 E: centre@ammerdown.org; website: www.ammerdown.org

Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter

34 Chepstow Villas, W11 2QZ Tel 020 7313 8286

E: sioncentrefordialogue@gmail.com

See website for full list of events and courses: www.sioncentre.org

STUDY DAYS 2017

11.00am – 3.15pm (Tea and coffee from 10.30am) Suggested Donation: £15

Wed. 22 February: Grappling with Galatians: Exploring Paul's Letter five hundred years after the Reformation
Speaker: Fr Adrian Graffy (Diocese of Brentwood; Member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.)

Wed. 8 March: *I have forgiven according to your word* (Numbers 14, 20) : Repentance in the Bible and in Jewish Tradition **Speaker:** Rabbi Rachel Montagu

Sat. 18 March Lent Reflection Day with Fr Anthony Maggs CRL

Wed. 22 March : "Like Streams in the Negev" (Ps126 : 4) Wilderness and Inspiration in the Hebrew Bible with Jonathan Gorsky (Lecturer in Jewish Studies at Heythrop College)

Thurs. 6th April: Jewish Feasts – Pesach with Rabbi Mark Solomon (Edinburgh and Leicester Progressive Jewish Communities, Interfaith consultant, Liberal Judaism)

SUNDAY AFTERNOONS

2.00pm – 4.00pm (Tea and Coffee from 1.30pm) Suggested Donation: £10

19 February: "Rabbi Richard Feder – My Hero" Rabbi Feder was rabbi of Kolin before and after the Holocaust. He survived Terezin where he conducted Christian funerals and became the last Chief Rabbi of Czechoslovakia in Communist times. **Speaker :** Rabbi Andrew Goldstein (Rabbi Emeritus Norwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue)

5 March, 26 March, 2 April 'From the Depths I Cry to You' Close Readings of the Psalms of Repentance **Speaker:** Jonathan Gorsky (Lecturer in Jewish Studies at Heythrop College)

Westminster Cathedral Interfaith Group Hinsley Room, Morpeth Terrace, SW1P 1Q **Meets every 3rd Wednesday [4-5pm]** Program this year based on Papal document: *Amoris Laetitia*, For further details please contact John Woodhouse by text: 0790 8888 586; or Email: woodhousesopen@btinternet.com

Gandhi Foundation

contact@gandhifoundation.org or 07910215651

South London Inter Faith Group

12.30-2pm. Meetings with Lunch on last Thursday of the month at Streatham Friends Meeting House, Roupell Park Estate, Redland Way, SW2 3LU.

Details: secretary@southlondoninterfaith.org.uk

North London Interfaith Discussion Group

meets monthly. Contact: Sister Elizabeth 0207 272 8048

St Ethelburga's Centre 78 Bishopsgate, London EC2N 4AG;T:020 7496 1610 www.stethelburgas.org; E: tent@stethelburgas.org

London Interfaith Centre

125 Salusbury Rd London NW6 6RG

<http://londoninterfaith.org.uk/>

Enquiries: info@londoninterfaith.org.uk

London Peace Pagoda Battersea Park

Ven S. Nagase, c/o Park Manager's Office, Battersea Park, Albert Bridge Rd, SW11 4NJ. T: 020 7228 9620 E: londonpeacepagoda@gmail.com

Monday 20th March Higan: Spring Equinox. Ancestors Ceremony at the *London Dojo*, 3pm

Saturday 8th April Buddha's Birthday (Flower Festival). At the *London Dojo*, 3pm

Friday 28th April Sunrise Prayer. At the *London Peace Pagoda* (around 5.45am). Anniversary of the First Chanting of *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*

Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist Temple

Willen Lake, Milton Keynes, MK 15 0BG T: 01908 663 652 E: mkpeacepagoda@gmail.com;

18-24 March Spring Equinox Special Service at 2pm on **Sun 20 March** in Temple

8 April Buddha's Birthday, 2pm Flower Festival in Temple

28 April Sunrise, Peace Pagoda, Anniversary of the First Chanting of *Namu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*

Three Faiths Forum

Contact Director, Phil Champain, 3FF, Star House, 104 Grafton Road, London NW5 4BA

Westminster Interfaith

Saturday 20th May: 32nd Annual Multi-Faith Pilgrimage for Peace in North London / Hertfordshire

Scarboro Missions Interfaith Department website with very useful resources for interfaith work. Contact: Paul McKenna, Scarboro Missions Interfaith Dept. 2685 Kingston Road Toronto, Ontario Canada M1M 1M4 www.scarboromissions.ca Tel. 416-261-7135 ext. 296

Pax Christi

Further details, contact: coordinator@paxchristi.org.uk

Marylebone Scriptural Reasoning

<marylebonesr@gmail.com>;

London Interfaith Centre - Tuesday 21st March, 6.30-9pm, Betrayal

Portcullis House - Tuesday 18th April (Mimouna), 7pm-10pm, Liberation

Calendar of Religious Festivals

- 1 March** **ST DAVID'S DAY** *National* Anniversary of the death of St David, the patron saint of Wales, who lived in the 6th century CE. As monk, abbot and bishop he helped to spread Christianity among the Celtic tribes of western Britain.
- 1 March** **ASH WEDNESDAY / LENT** *Christian (Western Churches)* The first day of Lent when Christians remember the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness. Lent is a time of prayer, fasting, charity and discipline in preparation for Easter. In Catholic and some Anglican churches, services are held where the worshipper's forehead is marked with a cross of ash to remember their mortality and re-commitment to the faith – hence the name Ash Wednesday
- 3 March** **HINAMATSURI / DOLLS' FESTIVAL / GIRLS' DAY** *Japanese* Clay dolls representing the Emperor and Empress, reminiscent of the ancient Heian court, are displayed in the home, and offerings of peach blossom, rice-wine and rice-cakes are placed before them, together with miniature multi-coloured sweetmeats. The dolls are intended to carry away any illness afflicting or threatening the daughters of the house. Prayers are said for daughters to grow up to be healthy and dutiful.
- 3 March** **THE WOMEN'S WORLD DAY OF PRAYER** *Christian* This international, interdenominational prayer movement began in 1887. In 2017 the theme will be 'Am I being unfair to you?' and the material is prepared by Christian women in the Phillipines.
- 10 March** **MAHAVIRA JAYANTI (599 BCE)** *Jain* Birthday of the last *Tirthankara*, or great teacher and model for the Jains.
- 11-20 March** **FRAVARDIGAN / MUKTAD** *Zoroastrian (Iranian)* Festival of *fravashis*, popularly known as *Muktad* (All Souls) begins ten days before NoRuz and is last festival of the year. The Zoroastrian day commences at sunrise and not midnight, and so during sunrise on the first day of the festival the immortal souls, together with their *fravashis* (the guardian spirits of departed ancestors, artistically depicted as half man/half bird), are welcomed by name by the Zoroastrian *Mobeds* or *Magi* (priests).
- 12 March** **PURIM** *Jewish* Celebrates the saving of the Jewish community of Persia, which is retold in the Book of Esther (the *Megillah*) and read twice in the synagogue. The name of Haman is drowned out with rattles and hooters by the congregation whenever it is read. *Hamantashen* (cakes filled with poppy seeds, literally 'Haman's pockets') are made and eaten at this time.
- 12/13 March** **MAGHA PUJA** *Buddhist* On this day 1,250 enlightened personal disciples of the Buddha came spontaneously to the Bamboo Grove on the full moon of Magha. The Buddha predicted his death and recited a summary of his teachings and a code of discipline (which monks are expected to recite every fortnight). The day is observed with meditation, chanting and listening to sermons.
- 13 March** **HOLI** *Hindu* A spring festival lasting one to five days. Bonfires are lit and revellers throw coloured powders and dyes over each other. This is linked with Krishna and his antics with the milkmaids.
- 14 March** **HOLA MAHALLA/MOHALLA** *Sikh* Introduced by tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh in 1680 as an alternative to the Hindu feast of Holi, this celebration includes competitive displays of swordsmanship, horsemanship, archery and wrestling, displays of weapons and symposia of poetry.
- 17 March** **ST PATRICK'S DAY** *National* Patron saint of Ireland, who lived in Britain in the 4th century CE.
- 19 March** **ST JOSEPH'S DAY** *Christian* Together with Mary, Joseph was responsible for Jesus' upbringing.
- 20 March** **SHUNBUN NO HI** *Japanese* Shunbun no Hi is the holiday celebrating the spring equinox. It is part of a seven-day period of festival called **HARO NO HIGAN**. As at the autumn equinox, harmony and balance are the themes, *sutras* are recited, and the graves of relatives are visited.
- 20 March** **NAW-RUZ** *Baha'i* New Year's Day and the end of the 19 day fast that ends the old year.
- 20 March** **SPRING EQUINOX (Ostara)** *Pagan* **VERNAL EQUINOX** *Druid* Night and day are equal. The Sun grows in power and the land begins to bloom. The God (the Green Man) awakens during this season. Some dedicate this time to Eostre, the Goddess of fertility
- 21 March** **JAMSHEEDI NORUZ** *Zoroastrian (Iranian)* New Year's Day in the Iranian Fasli calendar. It is a family day and eggs and evergreens figure as symbols of life, continuity and eternity.
- 24 March** **AVA MAH PARAB (ABAN JASHAN)** *Zoroastrian (Shenshai - Parsi)* Ava is short for the divinity Aredvi Sura Anahita, the protector of the waters, associated with fertility.
- 25 March** **THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD / LADY DAY** *Christian (Anglican, Roman Catholic and Orthodox)* (*Julian Calendar 7 April*) Lady Day celebrates the angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she is to bear a child, and Mary's response in the Magnificat. The day provides an opportunity to focus on the doctrine of the incarnation.
- 26 March** **KHORDAD SAL** *Zoroastrian (Iranian)* **22 August** *Zoroastrian (Shenshai)* The Birthday of Zarathustra falls on the sixth day following NoRuz. *Khordad* means perfection.
- 4 April** **FESTIVAL OF PURE BRIGHTNESS / TOMB SWEEPING DAY / QINGMINGJIE / CH'ING MING** *Chinese* Family graves are visited and cleaned.
- 5 April** **RAMA NAVAMI** *Hindu* Birthday of Rama, the seventh avatar of Vishnu.
- 8 April** **HANAMATSURI** (*Japanese Buddhist*) Birthday of the Buddha, fixed by Mahayana Buddhists in 565 BCE. This day is also celebrated by Pure Land Buddhists.

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Calendar of Religious Festivals:

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- 9 April** **PALM SUNDAY** *Christian (Western Churches)* (Orthodox date: 24 April) Christians remember Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, where later he would be arrested and crucified. Many churches commemorate the day by processions.
- 9-15 April** **HOLY WEEK** *Christian (Western Churches)* The most solemn week of the Christian year, in which Christians recall the events of the final week of the earthly life of Jesus.
- 11 April** **HANUMAN JAYANTI** *Hindu* The festival recalls the birth of Lord Rama's supreme devotee, the monkey-headed Hanuman, whose feats figure in the Ramayana epic.
- 1-18 April** **PASSOVER/PESACH** *Jewish* commemorates the liberation of the Children of Israel and their Exodus from slavery in Egypt. The highlight is the *Seder* meal, when the story of their deliverance is recounted. *Matzah*, (unleavened bread) is eaten throughout the festival, as are other foods that contain no leaven (yeast).
- 13 April** **SONGKRAN** *Buddhist* New Year's Day festival in Thailand, where jugs of water are thrown as a symbol of washing away all that is evil
- 13 April** **MAUNDY THURSDAY** *Christian (Western Churches)* Christians remember the Last Supper, at which Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and blessed bread and wine and commanded his disciples to remember him whenever they did this.
- 14 April** **GOOD FRIDAY** *Christian (Western Churches)* commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus. Although essentially a sombre day, it is called 'Good' since, for Christians, it is the ultimate example of God's sacrifice when Jesus gave up his life for the world.
- 14 April** **VAISAKHI/BAISAKHI** *Sikh* The Sikh New Year Festival. In 1699, on Vaisakhi, the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, founded the Order of the Khalsa. Five men were prepared to offer their lives when the Guru asked for volunteers
- 16 April** **EASTER DAY** *Christian (Western Churches)* Most important festival of the year, when Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
- 20 April-1 May** **RIDVAN** *Baha'i* Baha'u'llah declared himself the Promised One prophesied by the *Bab*. Baha'is elect their local, national and international governing bodies.
- 22 April** **ADAR MAH PARAB** *Zoroastrian (Shenshai - Parsi)* On the birthday of fire, Zoroastrians go to the fire temple to make offerings of sandalwood or incense and to thank the holy fire for the warmth and light it has given throughout the year.
- 23 April** **ST GEORGE'S DAY** *National* St George is the patron saint of England.
- 24 April** **YOM HA-SHOAH** (Holocaust Day) *Jewish* Day of remembrance for the 6 million Jewish victims of the Nazi holocaust. Closest date to Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.
- 24 April** **THE PROPHET'S NIGHT JOURNEY AND ASCENT / LAILAT UL ISRA WAL-MIRAJ** (27th *Rajab*) *Muslim* celebrates the journey of the Prophet Muhammad from Makkah to Jerusalem, through the heavens to the presence of God, all in one night.
- 28 April** **NICHIREN AND THE CHANTING OF THE DAIMOKU** *Buddhist* On 28th April 1253, at the age of 31, the Japanese Buddhist priest Nichiren (born 16 Febuary 1222 CE in the east of Japan) first taught the mantra *Nam myoho rengo kyo* to a small group at the Seichō-ji temple he had entered at the age of 20 in 1233. For Nichiren, the practice of chanting *Nam myoho rengo kyo*, (the *daimoku*) opens the path to inner transformation from which compassionate action for the happiness of self and others arises.

Perceptions!

Traveller: "What kind of weather are we going to have today?"
Shepherd: "The kind of weather I like."
"How do you know it will be the kind of weather you like?"
"Having found out, sir, that I cannot always get what I like, I have learnt always to like what I get. So I am quite sure we will have the kind of weather I like." Happiness and unhappiness are in the way we meet events, not in the nature of those events themselves.

A woman complained to a visiting friend that her neighbour was a poor housekeeper, "You should see how dirty her children are and her house. It is almost a disgrace to be living in the same neighbourhood as her. Take a look at those clothes she has hung out on the line. See the black streaks on the sheets and towels!" The friend walked up to the window and said, "I think the clothes are quite clean, my dear. The streaks are on your window."

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