

Inter-faith Week:

Opportunity for renewed hope

So England's first Interfaith Week has come and gone. "When all has been said and done", as they say, "an awful lot has been said and not a lot done!" Was that the case with Interfaith Week?

We might usefully acknowledge that there was something in Interfaith Week that had to do with our human nature, something that is at the very core of us all; fear and hope. The fear is the "fear of the other." The "other" does not dress like me and maybe trims his beard in a way that I do not. He worships on another day of the week and his wife dresses differently from mine - as he does from time to time. He finds security and affordability in a living in areas with others like him and he eats different foods. He is a Muslim, but could just as easily be a Jew, a Hindu, a Sikh or - if we lived in the US - the Amish or Mennonite. But somehow that difference frightens us. It frightens us because it is a veneer of a world of which we are not a part, know little and feel excluded. The "other" inhabits a world that has its values too, but our insularity and fear prevents us from knowing more of them. It is world with its millennia of insight, of learning, of wisdom, of sacredness and yearning for the Truth.

Interfaith organisations like CCJ acknowledged this fear, and seek to do something about it. We believe that a just society, a society worth living in, worth handing down to our children is built on the recognition, celebration and embracing of what is common, as well as delighting and exploring what is different about us. That difference can become a source of richness and growth. It is not built on making the other like us, for in that lays a deadly conformity. In conformity does not lie the flourishing we seek, but decay and drabness.

So all this urges us, beckons us, to hope; to believe in hope, to work for hope. Hope is, as Christians read in Paul's first letter to the early church in Corinth, part of that exciting and evocative triad of faith, hope and love. Hope takes us out of ourselves, through our suffering and beyond our comfort zone. Hope promotes courage and perseverance. Hope can cause us to take risks.

And perhaps therein lies what Interfaith Week started to do. Not only did it affirm the thousands of people in CCJ and others of Faith who for years have tried to tell and show the spiritual and cultural richness derived from listening and learning from the "other." It also called us to think bigger, to take risks and to hope. Interfaith week in common with interfaith dialogue did not call for abandoning or changing ones faith for another or the construction of a 21st century syncretism. Rather it afforded us an opportunity for a renewed hope in one another

It may have had political and social intentions, but Interfaith Week also -maybe even inadvertently - offered a springboard for us to see "the other" in the image of God, in all their richness, striving, pain and joy.

David Gifford, CEO

It's Hard to Say 'Sorry'

Guildford Branch of CCJ invited the local Inter-Faith Group to explore saying sorry, with a meeting on the **Power of Apology**, led by Simon Keyes from St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace. He challenged all with the question of what is the mark of a genuine apology and looked at various examples. The group was told that Apology involves a second party, it should lead to reconciliation and moving the situation on.



Birmingham Reinforces Bilateral Dialogue

Vibrant Birmingham CCJ had a strong presence in this year's Interfaith Week celebrations with a stall at the Birmingham Interfaith Fair. Not only did they recruit new members but they also were able to show the importance of bilateral dialogue. If this were not enough, they were also part of the **Roger-Hooker Memorial Lecture**, in association with Birmingham Council of Faiths. Rev. Stephen Barton, CCJ branch secretary, said "the Speaker, Atallah Siddiqi made a very strong appeal for bilateral relations to be pursued, especially to deal with issues of collective memory."

'Religious Punch-Up or Love-In?'

At CCJ Staines and District Branch, they confronted the main issues facing Interfaith dialogue with Jonathan Romain's presentation 'Religious Punch-Up or Love In - the state of interfaith dialogue today'. The meeting attracted folk from as far away as Fleet. All were greeted with excellent refreshments and given a conducted tour of the worship area of the synagogue.



Dialogue at Dulwich



Given that young people have a significant role to play in the future of CCJ and the whole process of dialogue, the SE London CCJ branch was pleased to promote at Dulwich College a well received **Discussion Forum** event with the Islam Study Society. They hosted six speakers from the pupil body to address two topics each - the first was common to all the faiths represented, namely attitudes to the afterlife. This was followed by each speaker considering a subject pertinent to their tradition - in Judaism the special quality of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony - while the problem of evil and suffering was touched upon in the Christian experience. A particularly impressive aspect of this meeting was that it was very much pupil led.

Open House at the Shul



photo by paul brown

Newcastle CCJ celebrated Interfaith week by organising an invitation from the Orthodox Synagogue to the Christian Churches in the area. Anglicans, URC and Methodists along with Catholics were treated to kosher refreshments and then a very informative and entertaining time with Rabbi Dovid Lewis. With his own inimitable wit and humour, Rabbi Lewis gave a whistle stop tour of Judaism, leaving everyone enlightened, uplifted and informed. The evening had to be brought to a reluctant close because of the time. Many people there had never been in a synagogue before but the response during the event and afterwards was very positive. "Building bridges" as one visitor commented.

Prayer Panel Evening

The Abbey Road New London Synagogue hosted an Interfaith panel on prayer, with speakers from Christian, Islam and Jewish faiths. The session was chaired by CEO David Gifford. All three speakers showed how each faith approaches prayer differently, but strong commonalities emerged. Thanks go to Rabbi Jeremy Gordon for hosting the event.

Finchley Branch recently said goodbye to Marion Randall, who has served CCJ for over 50 years. Angela Costley, CCJ Project Manager, and the Local Mayor were present to bid her farewell as she goes to join family in Canada.



Please help CCJ continue its work of combatting antisemitism and building understanding, tolerance and respect by making a donation **now**. Just fill in and cut out this section of the newsletter along the dotted lines and send it in an envelope to:

The Council of Christians and Jews, First Floor, Camelford House, 89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TP

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CCJ

Making a World of Difference

Welcome to Crystal Hall and Lucy Colah, who have joined CCJ on the **Vodafone World of Difference** Programme. Rabbi Markus Lange also joins Central Office from the Assembly of Masorti Synagogues, running the **Encounters** project. Markus' interests include rabbinic commentary and midrash, interfaith dialogue and music, making him an ideal person to engage in inter-faith work with the young Christian ministers and rabbis. Welcome.



Serious Talk in Bristol

CCJ's Avon Branch got down to some serious talking in its Interfaith Week. A workshop was held, looking at the topic of **Supersessionism**, studying many of the texts chosen to be read at various times of year to see if they would foster anti-Judaism. What they found instead was a thread of theology which challenges both faith communities. It was an evening of insightful discussion.



Teaming Up and going it Alone

Local radio interviews and press coverage about interfaith understanding ensured that CCJ Lincoln had a high turn-out for its Interfaith Week activities. Andrew White of "Beyond Images" showed another side of Israel that few see in the media. Later, 50 people joined the CCJ and local Inter-Faith Forum for the City Faith Walk.



Singing from the Same Hymn Sheet

CCJ South Hampshire Branch went musical for Interfaith Week with "Singing from the same hymn sheet - Interfaith dialogue through the music of prayer". Hosted by Bishop Michael and his wife, Lou, the meeting was held at Wolvesey Palace. CCJ members welcomed friends from the local Moslem communities. All were captivated to hear Jaclyn Chernetz give fresh insights into the background to Jewish Liturgical music through the ages, demonstrating the common ground between Jewish and Christian music for worship, and links to the music and liturgy of other faith traditions. Honey cake, Sherry and soft drinks brought the evening to a most comfortable end!



Come Share Our Sacred Space

Breaking down barriers has often been the rallying call of CCJ Harlow. The local CCJ and Harlow Jewish Community held a special Shabbat service, to which people of all faiths in Harlow were invited. The service began with a prayer for interfaith meetings, and included readings and prayers from faiths other than Jewish, which were part of the introduction to the regular Shabbat service. Many people, both Jews and non-Jews, were asked to read various passages during the service. Guests were also invited to have a look at the Torah scroll, which was much admired. After the service, of course, there was a festive Kiddush (a sharing of food and wine) prepared by members of the community.



CCJ Interfaith Week Lecture at the House of Lords

CCJ members, Trustees and Vice Presidents gathered together at the House of Lords to hear Minister for Communities Shahid Malik speak about the situation facing people of different faiths in the UK, touching on the sensitive issue of what it is to be "British". With great conviction, he told his own personal story of being a Muslim in Britain and the child of immigrants through amusing and sometimes poignant anecdotes. The evening ended with a question session that got to the heart of issues facing inter-faith dialogue. Lord Harris hosted and chaired the event and wisely guided an animated audience.



Making a Will

A bequest to CCJ is a lasting legacy that will reach to the heart of all that makes us truly human; both Jew and Christian. Why not call **020 7820 0090** and ask for a CCJ Legacy pack



Sunningdale Men's Monthly Breakfast

Men from St. Michael's Church Sunningdale mixed business with pleasure during Interfaith Week. As part of the Group's monthly meeting, St. Michael's Men's Breakfast decided to look at Interfaith dialogue in November. CCJ Chief Executive David Gifford spoke about the changing face of xenophobia and antisemitism in the UK. With such a vibrant group, it was to be expected that the meeting would go over time, and it did with vigorous discussion and questions.

Special Thanks...

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