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Quotable Quote:

“The future belongs to those who give the next generation reasons for hope”

Teillard de Chardin

Quarterly Newsletter of Cheltenham Inter Faith; reflections, reviews and news from Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. UK.

Is toleration a Virtue?

Cheltenham InterFaith is still here though we have had a gap with the newsletters. We are glad that other groups with faith community connections have been promoting their activities. Together we seek to foster unity and understanding. Its never more vital than today. Cheltenham Together in its series **“Life’s Big Questions”** presents an evening on the theme *“Is toleration of the “other” still a British value?”* Wednesday 18th October at 6.45pm at the Council Chambers. The poster shows a European Union flag crossed out, an English flag with the slogan “Refugees Not Welcome” and banners saying “No more mosques” with members of the English Defence League very prominent. There will be an expert panel and all are welcome.

How do we recover a sense of pride in our multifaith, multi- racial society? How do we rediscover what it means to be a part of the community of nations especially those who are our geographical neighbours? How do we learn to accept the decisions and judgements of those outside our borders and submit to a greater wisdom and authority? How can we halt the rise of xenophobia and get on to the “learning curve” of the world’s affairs. Now is the time to build one world of inclusivity and welcome.

Speakers & Events

Mark Evans is the Gloucestershire Security Advisor and **Rebecca Richardson** is County Hate Crime Co-ordinator with Gloucestershire Constabulary. In a time of increasing xenophobia, occasioned by the growth of religiously motivated terrorism and international instability and violence, faith communities are sometimes victimised. Islamophobia particularly is rising and it can be expressed by attacks on Muslims and their places of worship and other institutions. These are both physical and verbal. Good practising religious people have to face prejudice and discrimination in the media, from politicians and from the public at large. Our speakers will help explain how measures of protection that can be taken, how to monitor security and how best to respond to hate crimes.

Diary Dates

Tuesday 17th October Mark Evans and Rebecca Richardson on “Security for faith communities in a time of terrorism” 7.30pm Friends Meeting House, Cheltenham .

*Wednesday 15th November. National Inter Faith Week Meeting on the theme “ **The Search for the Meaning of Life**”. A Collaboration between the University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham Borough Council and Cheltenham InterFaith. 7.00pm-9.30pm. Park Campus, University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham.*

National Inter Faith Week is now in its ninth year. The Week aims to: Strengthen good interfaith relations at all levels;

Increase awareness of the different and distinct faith communities of our country and their contributions to the good of society and our local communities;

To increase understanding between religious people and those with no faith so as to raise the level of religious literacy and awareness.

Scriptural Reasoning

In October 2016 Georgina Jardim addressed CIF on the topic of scriptural reasoning with the Bible and the Quran and led an exercise regarding women in the early life of Moses from the Old Testament Book of Exodus, Chapters 1 and 2 and from Surah 28.

Scriptural reasoning is an emerging practice from people of different faiths committed to reading their scriptures together and exploring side by side what the texts mean for those present. The practice grew out of Jewish and Christian engagement and later extended to Muslims.

Scriptural reasoning is a wisdom-cultivating activity on the one hand and a peace-making activity on the other. The working assumption is that as God's creation we have innate natural wisdom to try to understand the world and religious texts. Familiarising ourselves with different sacred texts could open us to a common wisdom found through textual similarities. Yet as a peace-making activity scriptural reasoning grounds our discussion in the textual differences. The perplexing gaps or difficult ideas are not regarded as problems to be resolved but divine invitations to human creativity and reasoning in making sense of passages.

Interfaith dialogue is broadened by the practice of scriptural reasoning. It enables people from different and even opposing faith backgrounds to engage with each other in a way that lets them to cherish fully their own tradition but to be open to others. PS

Bicentenary of the Birth of Baha'u'llah

We congratulate the Baha'i community of Cheltenham on the celebration of the birth of the Prophet-Founder of their Faith on Saturday 21st October. We wish them a happy festival.

"Let your vision be world-embracing" Baha'u'llah.

Looking Back

The major event of 2016 was our celebration of **National Inter Faith Week** in November at the University. The theme chosen was “Welcoming the Outsider” - an interfaith response to the ongoing refugee crises. As usual the evening was jointly sponsored and organized by CIF, the University Chaplaincy and Cheltenham Borough Council.

“Scriptural Reasoning”, led by Georgina Jardim from the University, began the programme as teachings from the Bible and Quran about welcoming strangers were considered. A Syrian couple from the Yazidi Faith then spoke about their flight into exile. This was followed by a film made by University students regarding the work of the Gloucestershire Association for Refugees and Asylum Seekers and another film in which well known celebrities spoke of how their own families had found welcome refuge in the UK in the past.

There was plenty of time for group discussion and interaction between local peoples of different faiths as well as some of who had come from Stroud and from the Swindon interfaith group. BBC Radio Gloucestershire gave the usual good coverage with their Religious Affairs Reporter doing some interviews for his Sunday programme. *Jack Liebeskind*.

In January we welcomed as a speaker Anousheh Haghdadi, Chair of the local branch of **Srebrenica Remembered**, a charity which seeks to keep alive the memory of the victims of genocide in the Bosnian war, to teach lessons from the survivors and to work with the communities there to tackle intolerance. The power-point presentation was very informative and emotionally challenging. It encouraged CIF members to participate with the local MP, Alex Chalke, in the County’s official Srebrenica Commemoration at Cheltenham Borough Council Offices on 6th July. *Peter S*

Looking Back *continued*

The Baha'i community are good supporters of Cheltenham InterFaith. So we were delighted to have our Committee member Sarah Mar, Secretary of the local Spiritual Assembly, speak to us in February about the relevance of her faith to the world's current international problems. *PS*

The **CIF AGM** was held in March and was well attended. New committee members were introduced and their places and roles confirmed. The key note speaker was a CIF member, Dame Janet Trotter DSO, who is Lord Lieutenant of the County. She reiterated her commitment to interfaith engagement and stressed that it was as necessary in rural areas as urban ones. Prejudice can and does exist whether or not people of faiths different from ourselves are living amongst us or not. She emphasised the value of CIF linking with community organizations, especially those under the auspices of local authorities and she offered her services in making contacts.

After the formalities of the AGM refreshments were served and many new encounters were made and interfaith friendships strengthened.

Members of Cheltenham InterFaith were amongst the guests invited by Gloucestershire Liberal Jewish Community to celebrate their **Passover Seder** in the Spring. Rabbi Anna led the children in a lively re-enactment of the events of the Passover and service books were provided so we could follow the Service as she led it. Amongst the guests was the Bishop of Gloucester and a Roman Catholic priest from Rome whose home was in Sierra Leone. He was studying Liturgy at a Benedictine University and found the connection between the Passover and the Christian Eucharist very interesting. To be at home with our Jewish friends and seated together with them around a table was a great joy and privilege. As usual the hospitality was warm. *PS & JL*

Looking Back *continued*

CIF has been reflecting on its role and significance and we were very encouraged by the practical and visionary talk of Dame Janet Trotter at our AGM. It was followed in the weeks that followed by a talk from the Co-Chair of the National Interfaith Network, Mr Jatinder Singh Birdi. He was Chair of the Warwick District Faiths Forum. His talk was entitled “**The role of a local interfaith body**”. He spoke with many references to the work of his own Forum. It was obvious that he engaged in an enormous number of activities and our CIF audience wondered how he managed to find time for his ordinary day job! Like Dame Janet, Jatinder emphasised the importance of working with other local organizations in outreach to the wider community.

Following the summer CIF members and friends welcomed the Reverend David Godwin whose talk was entitled “**Reflections of a Jewish Christian**”. He had retired as Chaplain of Gloucestershire Royal Hospital following a long and fruitful ministry in various parishes. Only in recent times had he discovered that his mother’s family, who were Jews, had all perished in the Holocaust. Her parents had sent her to England for safety. They were deported from Dresden to Auschwitz. She never spoke about her painful experiences or that of her family, settled in England and married an Anglican priest, David’s father. A letter he received from the International Tracing Service of the Red Cross in 1997 set him off on an unexpected visit to Dresden and a very fruitful and revealing discovery of his mother’s family. This he then wrote up in his book “Proud Scars - reflections of a Jewish Christian”. It is both a personal and an historic account of the Jewish community in Dresden as the Nazis rose to power. David sadly reflected that Dresden and Saxony are once again seeing the rise of the extreme right there and party seats in the Bundestag for the first time since the War.

The Value of a Minute's Silence

The Bishop of Manchester has ministered in the city for many years. Following the recent terrorist bombing of the Arena where a Concert was being held he made this comment:

“The myth is of Britain being a secular society where religion only impacts upon us when it can be blamed for doing something dreadful. The reality is that the majority of us identify with some religious tradition, whilst even more find a need to engage at a spiritual level when events around them require them to dig into their core values. I learned from the Albert Square vigil and the memorial concert that a minute's silence is far more than an absence of noise. Some will pray, others will reflect, many will allow the outer silence to link them with their emotions and feelings. Crucially, the silence is a shared experience, not simply a set of private acts performed at the same time and space. Equally, when people in their thousands lit candles, laid bouquets of flowers, or had the Manchester bee tattooed on them, it was important that we were doing the same as others were doing. That in itself became an icon for our common grief and shared defiance, and our deliberate and repeated choice of love over hate”.
From Faith Initiative Issue 36.

Pilgrimage

Some CIF members have walked “The Camino” translated as The Way, a series of interconnecting pilgrim routes across Europe ending at the tomb of St. James in the Spanish City of Santiago de Compostelo. Millions have embarked on the journey and it is experiencing a popular revival, numbers increasing tenfold in a decade. It is a Christian trail based on ancient origins of Celtic ancestors seeking eternal youth at the Earth's End: Finis Terrae. But not all who walk are Christians. The journeying together is now done by people of all sorts, all religions and none who seek deeper meaning in their lives and an encounter with spirituality. Do you have a Camino story to tell?

Cheltenham Inter Faith: CIF continues to offer opportunities for understanding the various faiths around us. Members have been invited to a Workshop in Exeter on October 18th to prepare for Holocaust Memorial Day in January. In 2018 the theme will be “The Power of Words”- which will encourage people to think about how language has been used in the past and is used today to stir prejudice or bring healing. There will be an Act of Remembrance at the Council Chambers on 25th January 2018. We will remember the millions murdered in the Holocaust, the Nazi persecution, the Armenian massacre and genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

The website for CIF is managed by Chris Davies.

The newsletter, notices and items of interest appear, along with links to Inter Faith sites.

www.cheltenhaminterfaith.org.uk

CIF welcomes suggestions, proposals and ideas for topics, speakers and visits and links with other groups as well as news of local interfaith activity, which we are

Cheltenham Inter Faith is a membership association open to all with a commitment to interfaith understanding. It is a member of the InterFaith Network for the United Kingdom

Annual subscription £10 (guests £2).

Meetings monthly at The Friends Meeting House, Warwick Place, Portland Street, Cheltenham or at other venues as advertised.

We also advertise and support some meetings and gatherings that promote inter faith understanding in Cheltenham and beyond. These may be listed in our newsletter diary and indicated as such.

Visits: We like to visit regional places of worship and prayer to learn at first hand of the practices and beliefs of faith communities.

CIF is run by a committee elected at an Annual General Meeting



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