

## Hounslow Friends of Faith Annual Report 2008 – 9

This report covers the period from October 2008 to July 2009 and once again Hounslow Friends of Faith have been busy with, among other things, two talks, on Sikhism and on Hinduism, a second meeting of priests and faith leaders, a visit to the Chaplaincy at Heathrow Airport and our annual Walk of Peace and Friendship.



At our last AGM in October 2008 we welcomed the Imam of Hounslow Jamia Mosque and Islamic Centre, Sheik Nisar Ahmad Hussain Suleimani, to speak. He stressed family values and living a balanced life. In a talk entitled: "Islam in Britain: its contribution to the UK and to Hounslow", the Imam talked of how Islam encourages people to be spiritual. People of faith need to study scriptures for guidelines on how to live. "Friends of God can be judged by their intentions, which must be based on awareness and truth. There are suicide bombers, but their intentions are based on ignorance," he said.

Following on from this, in February we arranged a presentation at the Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha in Alice Way, Hounslow on Sikhism. Gurmit Kaur Gulati explained the role of the gurdwara in the life of Sikhs, describing it as a place to refocus on God and obtain both spiritual and physical refreshment. Gurpreet Rai explained the spiritual authority of the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book which is read continuously in every gurdwara. Kiran Rana spoke about the Sikh principles of meditation, equality, service, integrity and responsibility. Around 40 people attended the session, enjoying a vegetarian meal beforehand in the langar.



A similar number attended a second information event in June at the Laxmi Narayan Mandir. Using modern PowerPoint and traditional talk from the heart Harsh Haria gave a wide ranging introduction to the philosophy, scriptures, values, worship and symbols of Hinduism. Harsh, who teaches Hindu children in Hounslow about their culture and values through the organisation Balagokulam, explained these as including respect for the family, truth, righteous living, service and non-violence.

Religious preacher Swami Vishva Bharti Parivrajika challenged us to look to the divinity that is in our hearts rather than concentrating on outward transitory pleasures. Each person must discriminate between good and evil.

Also in June, Alfred Agius arranged a visit for us to part of the Chaplaincy at Heathrow Airport where he is a trustee. The Chaplaincy serves both the large workforce and the 60 million passengers who pass through the airport each year.

Between the two talks, in March HFOF organised a second meeting for priests and spiritual leaders from places of worship in Hounslow Borough. The meeting was addressed by the Bishop of London, the Rt. Rev. Richard Chartres on the theme of 'Living together in a multi-faith society'.

Bishop Richard noted that when he was appointed in 1995 there was little thought about contacts between peoples of different faiths. Now guests from other traditions are regularly invited to share in major faith events such as the recent installation of the new Bishop of Kensington. He urged people to get beyond polite platitudes. Those of different faiths do have many things in common in terms of creativity and moral values. There are also many areas where faiths disagree and we should be unapologetic about this. Speaking to someone from another faith 'changes the quality of the conversation' said the Bishop. 'See differences as an advantage, not a problem'.



On work with young people his advice was fourfold: 'Be convinced, be humble, be joyful and look cheerful in your faith'. Discussion afterwards focussed further on education and how faith group members can help bring religion to life by offering to visit schools as well as invite schools to visit places of worship.

Coincidentally, also in March several members of the committee were invited to attend a Multi Faith assembly at Cranford Community College.



In June more than 40 people joined this year's Walk of Peace and Friendship, visiting four places of worship in Hounslow. The Church of the Good Shepherd and St Johns Mar Thoma which originates in Kerala in South India, the Shree Jalaram Hindu Temple and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association, are all within one parish in Hounslow West and little more than mile apart from each other. Friendships were reinforced as people shared one another's stories. Participants saw how buildings belonging to one faith were often used for the benefit of the wider community. Young volunteers participating in the three month Global Xchange placement currently in Hounslow carried our banner and enjoyed the chance to visit different places of worship. Once again we are most grateful to all the venues for welcoming us so warmly.

Two of the Global Xchange volunteers are currently working with us at The Hub Community Centre in Hounslow West to increase links between different faith groups.

In January we lost our Chairman Carol Liphthorpe when she was posted to Cairo. Carol had been a founder member of Hounslow Friends of Faith and served as Secretary, Vice Chair and Chair as well as taking the lead in organising many of our One World Week events each year. She was presented with a gift and our very best wishes at a farewell event at the Brahma Kumaris Centre. She will be greatly missed. We did not appoint another Chair to replace Carol before this AGM and have been grateful to our two Vice Chairs, Tahir Aslam and Jagjiwan Singh for looking after us in the meantime.



On the domestic front our website has been revamped. Do have a look on [www.hounslowfriendsoffaith.org](http://www.hounslowfriendsoffaith.org). We also want to express our thanks to our volunteer Isha Agarwal who is updating the information on the Directory of Places of Worship in Hounslow which can be accessed on the website.

Hounslow Friends of Faith continues to be known for its work increasing public knowledge of faiths and for bringing members of the different faith traditions together. We hope we can continue to play our part in listening to each other and building bridges.

In conclusion, I would like to thank everyone on the committee and members of the organisation for their support and their contribution towards the work of HFOF during 2008-9.

Bessie White  
Secretary July 2009