Hounslow Friends of Faith
Annual Report 2010 – 11

This year has seen an expansion in the number, range and direction of our activities.

We began the year at our last AGM with a panel discussion 'What my faith means in my life'. Representing Judaism, Islam, Christianity and Sikhism, Basil Mann, Afsana Gohabar, Barbara Witzenfeld, and Jaswinder Dua described what their faith meant to them personally in their everyday lives. All speakers welcomed the inter faith contacts possible in Hounslow with the opportunities of sharing their faiths. Chairing the panel, Alfred Agius noted how God works in different ways, nourishing each contributor in their faith.

This year we decided to hold our autumn event not in One World Week as in past years, but to mark Inter Faith Week, the week promoted by the Inter Faith Network in England and Wales to strengthen good inter faith relations. Titled 'Expressions of Faith through art, music and fashion', attendees were encouraged to participate in a range of workshops to try crafts from different cultures and faiths.

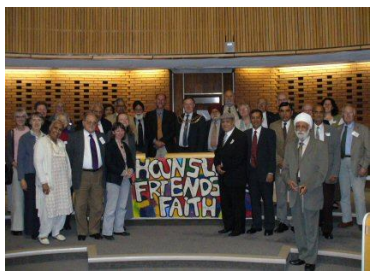
After a lunch generously donated by the Shree Jalaram Sewa Trust, the Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha and St Michael and St Martin's Catholic Church, there were performances from a wide range of community groups representing Nigerian Christians, Nepalese dancers from the Gurkha Community, Events4Youth, a youth project working through the Hounslow Volunteer Centre, Sikh singers, a Somali fashion show and dancers from a Hindu community group. The event was facilitated by LB Hounslow who generously allowed us use of the Lampton Park Conference centre. The day was opened by the Archdeacon of Middlesex, Rev Stephan Welch. The Mayor of Hounslow attended, as did Councillor Ruth Cadbury, Acting Leader of the Council, and the Lead Member for Communities Councillor Raj Bath. Feedback from the approximately 400 visitors included *'You people are doing a (sic) excellent job and please keep going'* and *'It was fantastic and look forward to another one'*.

One of the particular successes of this event was the inter faith knitting workshop. This has continued to meet on a monthly basis making blankets for charity kindly, hosted by St Mary the Virgin Church in Twickenham.

Two completely new projects were undertaken in the spring of 2011. We were awarded a grant under the Strengthening Communities Small Grants Scheme administered by LB Hounslow. Under the theme of Citizenship and Integration, we set up two ESOL classes for isolated women, one at Norwood Green Children's Centre and one at South Isleworth Children's Centre. These ran from January until 1st April. They ended with the students giving a presentation to a small audience from the community. Part of the project was to provide volunteers to support the class and provide information on British life and outings into central London. After the end of the course students were referred to Adult Education and West Thames College classes.

This project achieved its targets set by the funders and provided some useful links for HFOF with other community groups, resource centres and with newer arrivals. It required, however, a great deal of time and oversight to manage the project as well as giving extra work to our treasurer. Anything similar will not be possible without funding for a paid worker.

The second project was funded through Faiths in Action, a funding stream of the Department for Communities and Local Government. It was to run a short five session course to provide some training for volunteers to go into primary schools to offer support to RE teachers. The initial stimulus for the project came last year when a primary school approached us for names of volunteers from different faiths who would go into the school to talk to the pupils about their faiths. It was felt that if we might receive other such requests it would be advisable for the volunteers to receive some introductory training. We saw the volunteers as being 'ambassadors' for their faiths providing an additional resource and not in any way plugging gaps in the education service. The tutor for the course was Lesley Prior, former RE Advisor to LB Hounslow. A booklet containing contact details for the volunteers was distributed to all primary schools in the borough. We will follow up the project next academic year to see if and how the volunteers have been used.



Our annual Meeting of Priests and Faith Leaders and educationalists took place in May with Mayor Councillor Colin Ellar presiding. We met first for lunch at the Laxmi Narayan Temple before moving to Hounslow Council Chamber for an address by Martin Palmer, Director of ARC, the Alliance of Religion and Conservation. His stimulating talk encouraged us to go beyond inter faith pleasantries. He challenged us to demonstrate the relevance of our faiths through a shared commitment to sustainability and

support for firms which have good trade and employment practices. He hoped we could work together with official bodies on this, for example building on our good links with the local council. A priority for HFOF will be seeing how this work can be taken forward.

Our annual Walk of Peace and Friendship took place on 3rd July this year, centred on Hounslow and receiving warm hospitality wherever we went. The start was at Holy Trinity Church in Hounslow High Street, a new venue for us, hearing about the work of the church and ideas for the future. A question and answer session followed at the Sikh Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha and again at the Hounslow Jamia Mosque. We ended at the Brahma Kumaris with a short meditation. The new Mayor of Hounslow, Councillor Amrit Mann, attended with the Mayoress, Mrs Simrit Mann, walking part of the way with us.

During the year we were distressed by the publicity given to a US pastor who threatened to burn a copy of the Koran. We decided not on this occasion to draw attention to this despicable incident by making a public statement, but we have set up procedures so we can do this speedily if it is ever deemed necessary.

Other activities this year have included stalls at spring and summer fairs in Heston, Isleworth, Brentford and Osterley Park. In June committee member Divya Din spoke about our work at a Richmond Fellowship event for service users. Our newest project is our Women's Discussion Group, at present funded for a year. This is planned to meet bi-monthly on a mid-week evening. We hope by setting this up we can extend inter faith work to a new constituency.

Our relations with Hounslow Council are good with staff from the Community Services Section being very supportive. The proposal to establish a formal Faith Forum referred to in last year's report was not pursued by the administration elected in May 2010. We are consulted from time to time on faith matters, e.g. by Emergency Planning to make sure faith requirements are considered in a response to a major incident and any available faith resources whether of people or buildings shared. The last Mayor, Councillor Colin Ellar, attended a number of our events. The newly appointed Mayor, Councillor Amrit Mann, continues this interest. He has asked for an 'interfaith chaplaincy', i.e. for the prayers at the start of borough council meetings to be from a different faith each time, to fully reflect the diversity of the borough's population. This year much of our funding, for the ESOL project, the new women's group and for our day to day projects has come from Hounslow in addition to use of the Civic Centre for two of our events.

Inter Faith work is now well established in Hounslow. There are still things to

be done, of course, to sustain these links and develop new ones with faith communities at the further ends of the borough. But perhaps the big challenge for us now is to consider how we take the work forward to show our faiths in action, together.

Bessie White
Secretary July 2011