



HOUNSLOW FRIENDS OF FAITH

Newsletter ~ February / March 2022

Keeping you up to date with Interfaith and Community News

Hounslow's Holocaust Memorial Virtual Event

The theme for this year's Holocaust Memorial Day was '**One Day**' and Hounslow's event was held on **Wednesday 26th January 11.30am – 12.30pm** on Microsoft Teams with over 30 people joining together with Year 9 pupils from Lampton School, who had been learning about the Holocaust. Tim Durrant, Events Programme Manager with LBH Council, gave an introduction and thanked Basil Mann and Charanjit Ajit Singh for their help in organising the event. Then the Mayor, Councillor Bishnu Gurung, gave a welcome to everyone and introduced the speaker Dr Martin Stern MBE.



Martin Stern was born in Hilversum in Holland in September 1938. Martin's father, Rudolph, was a Jewish architect from Berlin and his mother was a non-Jewish woman. Together in 1938 they fled to Belgium and were married. They then moved to Hilversum in the Netherlands, where Martin was soon to be born. Martin remembers playing in the street with other children and having a pleasant childhood before the war. Although, he recalls his mother being cautious and worried about people noticing him and began to keep him inside.

After the Nazi's invaded Holland, Martin's father, being a Jew, was no longer able to pursue his career as an architect and began to make and sell wooden toys. Martin's father eventually joined the Dutch resistance and went into hiding at a farm near Amsterdam. During this time Martin's mother had fallen pregnant and on November 20th, 1942, Martin's father returned to his family for the birth of his daughter, Erica. Unfortunately, Martin's mother became ill after the birth and died. Martin and Erica were then looked after by separate families and his father went back into hiding, later he was caught and sent to die in a concentration camp.

As Martin's father was a Jew, Nazi law proclaimed that Martin was also a Jew and the couple looking after Martin were doing so illegally. One day when Martin was at school two Dutch men entered the classroom and took Martin to an interrogation centre. At the interrogation centre Martin saw the man who had been looking after him and upon his recognition verified that the couple had indeed been concealing a Jew. This innocent mistake led to Martin being taken away and the arrest of the couple looking after him.

Martin was put on a train to Westerbork transit camp. The family looking after his sister were also ordered to hand her over, and she too was sent to Westerbork and placed in a section of the barracks for babies.

Eventually Martin and Erica were sent to Terezín (Theresienstadt) in Czechoslovakia. It was here that they came under the care of a Dutch woman who had married a Jewish man. When the day came that Martin and Erica's names were listed to be deported from the camp, she volunteered to accompany them, knowing the chances of survival would be slim. When seated in a hall waiting to board a train, they waited to hear their names be called. However, for reason unknown, their names were never called, and the train left without them.

They were liberated from Theresienstadt in May 1945 by the Russian Army. Martin was just 6 years old. Martin and his sister were returned to foster families in Holland. Martin stayed with few families before moving to be fostered in England in 1950. Martin remained in England and despite spending years apart managed to reunite in the 1980's with the Dutch woman who saved them. Martin studied medicine at Oxford University, later specialising in asthma and allergic diseases. He married and had three children and now has seven grandchildren. However he says one never fully recovers from such trauma in childhood and his life has always been difficult.

The Lampton pupils asked some interesting questions which helped everyone hear more of the speaker's story, which he insisted was the story of adults who did good things and rescued him. Dr Stern said that the perpetrators of genocides are ordinary people who become monsters and cited later genocides since the Holocaust. He advocates teaching children from a young age that we must care about the whole human race not just our own community.

The Leader of the Council Steve Curran gave a vote of thanks and spoke about the diversity of Hounslow Borough and that it is good to get to know people who are different from us.

During World Interfaith Harmony Week HFOF held a virtual Interfaith Tribute to Archbishop Desmond Tutu at 7pm on Thursday 3rd February on zoom

Desmond Tutu, aged 90, died peacefully in Cape Town on 26 December 2021



After viewing a moving interfaith video tribute from Cape Town, South Africa, where Desmond Tutu had been Archbishop since 1986, several HFOF members contributed tributes to him as a courageous political campaigner for justice and peace.

Charanjit AjitSingh reminded those present on the zoom that Tutu lead a life of 'fighting for social and racial justice, the vulnerable and the poor and of simplicity while occupying the highest Anglican office in South Africa'. His deep spirituality and humanity, love for all including the oppressors, his dream for a rainbow nation, were manifest in abundance not just in the words he communicated but also in his deeds and everyday actions. He worked tirelessly across the globe to improve the life chances of women and children and it brought him

worldwide recognition, a Nobel peace prize in 1984, Templeton Award and many more. Yet, those who met him or were in his presence, experienced his bewitching humanity, and his seeing the divine in all, whether they were believers of Christianity or not. He was a short man with a massive iconic stature. She also shared her testimony of being present at a session of the post-apartheid 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission' with Desmond Tutu in the Chair, which for her had been an unforgettable experience.

Anne van Staveren shared that in the 1980s she was privileged to meet Desmond Tutu several times in the course of her work on news and publications for the Anglican mission agency now called United Society Partners in the Gospel. When the United Nations declared 1986 an international Year of Peace, she wrote to many people of faith around the world, inviting them to say what peace meant to them. These were featured in an article she wrote for the agency magazine. Desmond Tutu sent this prayer to her:

***Goodness is stronger than evil;
Love is stronger than hate;
Light is stronger than darkness;
Life is stronger than death;
Victory is ours through him who loved us***

David Baldwin shared how Desmond Tutu was a champion for sexual equality. In a book coauthored by Dr Ezra Chitando (University of Zimbabwe) and Prof Adriaan van Klinken (Centre for African Studies University of Leeds) Desmond Tutu's strong advocacy on issues of sexuality and the rights of lesbian and gay people is described. For instance in 2013, in typical Tutu fashion, in a clear statement, he said he would not wish to worship a homophobic God. His commitment to defending gay and lesbian rights goes back to the 1970s and was in continuity with his long standing resistance against apartheid.

The Constitution of South Africa adopted in 1996 includes a non-discrimination clause that lists sexual orientation alongside race and other characteristics. Tutu actively lobbied for this and it was the first country in the world to do so. He believed equality and human rights are interconnected and we cannot claim rights for one group of people while denying them to others,

Shortly after the end of apartheid in 1994 Tutu wrote:

'If the church, after victory over apartheid, is looking for a worthy moral crusade, then this is it: the fight against homophobia and heterosexism.'

He used strong theological terms 'heresy' and 'blasphemy' to denounce apartheid meaning that it was in conflict with the most fundamental Christian teaching in that it can make a child of God doubt that they are a child of God. He wrote that it was *'the ultimate blasphemy'* to make lesbian and gay people doubt whether they truly were children of God and how they were created by God.

Barbara McIntivey had joined a global zoom entitled: *Celebrating Tutu's Legacy* on Sunday 30th January organised by Sabeel Kairos UK. There were distinguished speakers from South Africa, Germany and UK. The zoom was to highlight and promote a new 2021 publication: *Ecumenical Encounters with Desmond Mpilo Tutu, Visions for Justice, Dignity and Peace* published by Regnum Books. This book is said to be an inspiring collection of 72 critical and creative contributions honouring the life and work of Desmond Tutu. Three of the five editors of the book spoke and also friends and colleagues, some from Kings College in London where Tutu studied from 1962 – 66 and where he completed his Masters degree on Islam. Other speakers were friends from the World Council of Churches, also Rev. Edwin Arrison who was ordained by Tutu and the Rt. Hon. Paul Boateng MP. Many spoke warmly about Desmond Tutu's joy, humour and love of dancing and praised his vision for justice and his outspoken criticism of racism, homophobia, his support of women's ordination and promotion of liberation for all - including Palestinians. Others described his spirituality and strong prayer life. It was

clear that Tutu's vision of ecumenism was wider than Christianity, he famously declared *God is not a man and not a Christian*. A reminder was given that Tutu never forgot an experience he had aged 8 when he was walking with his mother and a white Anglican priest doffed his hat to his mother, an act unheard of in the days of apartheid.

World Interfaith Harmony Week



Rev Adam Nyawo blessing the sapling 2019



Hawthorn 3 years later February 2022





Our RWH group has been very busy, having welcomed 3 new families on resettlement programmes since September and supported a number of Asylum Seekers who have been placed in Hounslow hotels under difficult conditions.

The families who arrive on resettlement programmes have been Syrian up till recently but we have now received one Afghan family and we are expecting a number of others in the coming weeks. We have also received a Sudanese family and we are expecting another imminently. We are now hearing that Hounslow Borough Council is planning to receive at least 20 more Afghan families so we expect to continue to be busy.

The situation for Asylum Seekers in hotels is extremely concerning. Usually the hotel is contracted to give them all their food and they are also allowed £8 a week for all other expenses such as travel, phone expenses and clothing. The diet offered by the hotels all too often proves inadequate in quality and quantity and this is especially egregious in the case of children and pregnant and nursing mothers.

Enrolling children from Asylum Seeking families or unaccompanied minors in school is a challenge we have become involved with alongside the Local Authority. This can be complex and involves associated costs for school uniform, shoes and travel that cannot be covered out of £8 a week.

We have a settled group of Syrian families who arrived some 4 years ago and are largely flourishing. One family has had a new baby since they arrived and a number of them have jobs and in one family both parents have passed their driving test and they have bought a car. One has become a very active volunteer with us, giving us invaluable support with asylum seekers and new arrivals on resettlement programmes.

We have regular very enjoyable social gatherings which are open to all of our volunteers and everyone we support. A group of HFOF women are planning a social event for our families during the coming half term. We wish them well with this and see it as a welcome development that we will hope to build on.

We are anticipating an extremely busy period and are grateful for the support Hounslow Friends of Faith have given us when we have asked for specific items and hope we can continue to ask for items as needs arise.

Financial donations are always welcome and our small group of volunteers will need to be increased to meet the demands of so many new families arriving in the Borough. Volunteering with Refugees Welcome Hounslow can be busy but it is also extremely rewarding and often great fun. Do contact me if you would like to discover more about it. We will be holding an information/training session next month and would welcome interest in attending this.

Shelagh Allsop Chair, Refugees Welcome Hounslow
Shelagh.allsop@gmail.com



Congratulations to HFOF Trustee Mukesh Malhotra on being awarded a British Empire Medal in the Queen’s New Year Honours for services to the community in the London Borough of Hounslow particularly during Covid-19.

Harpreet Kaur Chandi (‘Polar Preet’)



Captain Harpreet Chandi is a British army officer and physiotherapist. She is the first woman of colour (Indian) to complete a solo expedition to the South Pole on 3 January 2022. She trekked 700 miles in 40 days, facing temperatures of -50C.

Preet Chandi is an adventurer, trekker, and physiotherapist. She is a captain in the British Army. Preet is known as Polar Preet for her expeditions and trekking adventures. She also completed a 156-mile ultramarathon across the Sahara Desert in 2019. She is an alumnus of the Queen Mary University. Preet is also a famous tennis player and has won several awards for her tennis tournaments. She began practicing tennis during her school days, she joined Sutton Tennis Academy for her tennis practice. From 2005 – 2007, Preet attended Novak Tennis Academy, Czech Republic. In 2012 she obtained BSc in Physiotherapy from St George’s University and earned her master’s degree of MSc in Sports and Exercise Medicine from Queen Mary University. She then began working as a physiotherapist in the British Army. Preet said people at her local Sikh Gurdwara in Derby were surprised she had undertaken the challenge and was told she “didn’t look like a polar explorer.” In fact they thought she was going to Southall.

“This expedition was always about so much more than me. I want to encourage people to push their boundaries and to believe in themselves, and I want you to be able to do it without being labelled a rebel. I have been told no on many occasions and told to “just do the normal thing”, but we create our own normal. You are capable of anything you want. No-matter where you are from or where your start line is, everybody starts somewhere. I don’t want to just break the glass ceiling; I want to smash it into a million pieces.”

Preet has raised money for two different causes during her expedition, one for an adventure grant she is setting up for females conducting unusual challenges, the other for Khalsa Aid.

Article submitted by HFOF Trustee Barinder Sandhu

Best wishes to all who will be observing days of special significance:

February

- 15th** **Buddhist: Parinirvana** marks the final passing away from this world of Gautama Buddha at Kushinagara, India, at the age of 80.
- 16th** **Buddhist: Magha Puja** 1,250 enlightened disciples came to the Bamboo Grove on the full moon of *Magha*. The Buddha predicted his death and gave a summary of his teachings and a code of discipline which all monks are expected to recite every fortnight. The day is observed with meditation, chanting and listening to sermons.
- 28th/1st** **Hindu: Mahashivratri (Great Shiva Night)** this is the night on which Shiva is said to perform the cosmic dance, leading from creation to destruction. Many Hindus fast at this time. All-night prayers focus on Shiva and his shrines and statues. Milk is poured on his symbol, the *lingam*.

March

- 1st** **Christian: Shrove Tuesday** (Western Churches) in Britain called 'Pancake Day' as pancakes use up all the rich foods before the Lent fast. Elsewhere it is known as 'Mardi Gras' (Fat Tuesday) and is a time for carnivals.
- 1st** **Muslim: The Prophet's Night Journey and Ascent** which marks the night journey of the Prophet Muhammad through the heavens to the presence of God when the command that Muslims should pray five times a day was given to the Prophet. The rock from which the Prophet ascended is now in Jerusalem's 'Dome of the Rock'. Muslims spend this night reading the Qur'an and saying additional prayers.
- 2nd** **Christian: Ash Wednesday**, (Western Churches) This is the first day of Lent when the temptations Jesus faced for forty days in the wilderness are remembered. In some churches worshippers' foreheads are marked with a cross of ash made from burning the palm crosses of the previous year.
- 2nd – 15th April** **Christian: Lent** (Western Churches) a period of forty days of fasting, self-discipline and spiritual reflection leading up to Easter (not counting Sundays).
- 4th** **Christian: The Women's World Day of Prayer** this international, interdenominational prayer movement was begun in 1887. The service material is produced by a different country each year. This year the theme is: *I know the plans I have for you* prepared by Christians in England Wales and Northern Ireland.
- 11th – 20th** **Zoroastrian (Iranian):** During this **Fravardigan** festival the immortal souls, together with their *fravashis* (the guardian spirits of departed ancestors) come to reside in the place of worship.
- 17th** **Jewish: Purim** a festival recalling the saving of the Jewish community of Persia as retold in the Book of Esther which is read out twice in each synagogue. The name of Haman is drowned out with rattles, hooters and boos by the congregation whenever it is read.

March

- 17th/18th** **Hindu: Holi** a spring festival lasting one to five days. Coloured powders and dyes are thrown over people. Various stories of Vishnu and of Krishna and the *gopis* (milkmaids) are related.
- 18th/20th** **Sikh: Hola Mahalla/Hola** In 1680 Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, introduced this festival at Anandpur in Punjab, India, on the day after the Hindu Holi. It includes displays of swordsmanship, horsemanship, archery and wrestling, together with displays of weapons and symposia of poetry, making it a lively and colourful occasion, particularly for young Sikhs.
- 19th** **Muslim: The night of Forgiveness/Lailat-ul-Bara'ah** is the birthday of the 12th Imam Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Mahdi (Shia). Muslims seek forgiveness for their sins at this time. Many hold that on this night a person's destiny is fixed by Allah for the coming year. The night is spent in prayer, asking for forgiveness and God's guidance.
- 21st** **Bahai: Naw-Ruz, New Year's Day** and the end of the nineteen day fast that concludes the old year.
- 21st** **Zoroastrian: Jamshedi Noruz (Iranian)** New Year's Day occurs on the first day of spring and represents the resurgence of life and the symbolic victory of the forces of light over darkness.
- 23rd** **Zoroastrian: Ava Mah Parab (Shahenshahi – Parsi)** Ava is the guardian of the waters and is associated with fertility. Zoroastrians celebrate the birth of the waters by going to seas, rivers and streams to recite litany to the waters.
- 26th** **Zoroastrian: (Iranian) Khordad Sal** The birthday of Prophet Zarathushtra.

April

- 2nd – 1st May** **Muslim: Ramadan** month of fasting expected to begin.
- 2nd - 10th** **Hindu: Chaitra Navratri** is a festival dedicated to the worship of Goddess Durga and her nine forms through the nine days.
- 10th** **Hindu: Rama Navami** - the birthday of Rama, the seventh avatar of Vishnu, is celebrated at noon in the aarti ceremony, performed in front of a doll or of a picture depicting Rama swinging in a cradle.
- 10th – 16th** **Christian: Holy Week** The most solemn week of the Christian year, in which Christians recall the events of the week in which Jesus was crucified.
- 13th – 15th** **Buddhist: Songkran** - New Year's Day festival
- 14th** **Sikh: Vaisakhi/Baisakhi** is a Harvest Festival and New Year celebration. Sikhs remember the founding of the Order of the Khalsa in 1699 by the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh.

Please send Items for next Newsletter to info@hounslowfriendsofffaith.org by 25th March