

CIRcular



For Friends involved in local ecumenical and interfaith work

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Interfaith Reception at the Scottish Parliament

As a member of the local Dumfries Interfaith Group I attended a reception on St Andrew's Day at the Scottish Parliament building in Edinburgh (worth seeing, but not worth going to see, as someone once said).

Interfaith Week for Scotland was inaugurated in 2004 and will be an annual event, celebrated around the time of St Andrews Day. The Scottish executive is supportive of interfaith work and the reception, sponsored by Shiona Baird MSP, was held to recognise this and to give an opportunity for the Scottish Interfaith Council (SIFC) to thank the Executive with a gift which will hang in the Parliament building.

This gift (definitely worth going to see) was one of the two highlights of the evening for me. It took the form of a saltire, on which was printed quotations from many faiths on the four themes of justice, compassion, wisdom and integrity. Each quadrant of the saltire was devoted to one of these virtues, which are also inscribed on the parliamentary mace. It is hoped that this gift can be reproduced in the form of a poster by the SIFC.

There were several speeches of course, both by some of Scotland's religious leaders and ministers of the Scottish Parliament, all showing their commitment to the interfaith process. The one which has particularly remained in my mind was by a young lady (a Muslim I think) from the youth section of the SIFC, who spoke quite rightly, of going beyond tolerance. Tolerance is not enough, though it is a necessary starting point. But it is cold, and carries with it notions of superiority. We must accept and embrace faiths other than our own if we are to progress as a multifaith society.

The other highlight of the evening was the first item sung by the Edinburgh Interfaith Choir. This was in the form of a round, and included important phrases from many faiths mingling together. I would have liked a copy of this in writing because of course the different languages used made recognition difficult at times, though I clearly made out the Jewish "Shalom", the Christian "Gloria in Excelsis" and the Buddhist "Om Mani Padme Hum".

I'm not sure if there were any other Quakers at the reception, certainly none I recognised, though there was a young man from Aberdeen (or was it Inverness?) who was rather mysterious about his allegiance! But I enjoyed the buffet alongside two Buddhists (of different traditions), a Roman Catholic nun and a Jewish rabbi, and that's what it's all about.

Jan Lethbridge - Dumfries & Galloway PM



Pictured here are the Dumfries Interfaith Group at the Scottish Parliament reception. Jan Lethbridge (left), together with the host MSP Shiona Baird (second right).

Editorial

At the time of putting together this edition of CIRcular, events in Israel and Lebanon are dominating the headlines. I visited Lebanon at Easter in happier times, and had an impression of a country beginning to find its feet again and striving to represent all its citizens. The picture shows the editor with Garo Haddad, an Armenian Christian, in the grounds of Brummana Quaker School overlooking Beirut.

Since returning to the UK, I have attended 2 conferences on the Middle East, one organised by the British Museum on “Faith in the Middle East” and one organised by the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies” on “Faith, Politics and Society”.

The proliferation of Christian Churches, Muslim sects and other minority faiths is a complexity of the whole region, and the variety of political and religious groupings makes interfaith and interchurch dialogue an urgent necessity in a

region where tensions between different groups can so easily explode into violent confrontation. There were many hopeful signs in Lebanon before the present crisis. Let us hope and pray that violence has not killed off the growing spirit of co-operation and dialogue.

Linda Pegler, Editor



Travelling Together as Neighbours

This was the title of a conference for Friends organised by the Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations held during June at Woodbrooke. Two speakers, Salma Yaqoob and Faraz Yousefzai, shared their thoughts on family and community, and how people of different traditions can work together in creative ways.

Salma Yaqoob has experienced prejudice against her as a Muslim woman, but has spoken out fearlessly against the war in Iraq, and has made many friends from other traditions with whom she can work. Faraz Yousefzai's talk concentrated on education and the need to inculcate values of respecting all humanity in the young. As a father, he saw the value of love beginning in the family, and from there extending

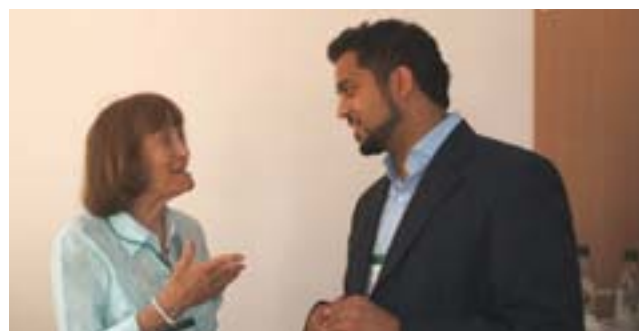
out to everyone.

In small groups Friends discussed their own and their meeting's involvement in interfaith relations and how this might be extended. In the plenary session Friends particularly mentioned the forthcoming 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in 2007 as an opportunity to work with others both to celebrate the achievements of the past and to continue to work to abolish modern forms of slavery.

For more information on church related projects on the abolition of slavery see 'Set All Free', a project of Churches Together in England. www.setallfree.net/



Salma Yaqoob talks to Friends in the dining room at Woodbrooke.



Faraz Yousefzai in conversation with Marian Millington.

Called to be One Church

One of the stated purposes of the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations is to respond on behalf of the Yearly Meeting so that Friends' views on issues of faith and order are represented to other churches and communities of faith. Very often Quakers are defined by other churches in terms of their own theology.

QCCIR suspect it might be helpful for all those involved in interchurch work to reflect on questions posed by the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in February 2006 in Porto Alegre, Brazil in its document "Called to be One Church".

Some may question the goal of "full visible unity", but if we are to engage with other churches we need to wrestle with the questions posed.

- a) To what extent can your church discern the faithful expression of the apostolic faith in its own life, prayer and witness and in that of other churches?
- b) Where does your church perceive fidelity to Christ in the faith and life of other churches?
- c) Does your church recognise a common pattern of Christian initiation, grounded in baptism, in the life of other churches?
- d) Why does your church believe that it is necessary, or permissible, or not possible, to share the Lord's Supper with those of other churches?
- e) In what ways is your church able to recognise the ordered ministries of other churches?
- f) To what extent can your church share the spirituality of other churches?
- g) How will your church stand with other churches to contend with problems such as social and political hegemonies, persecution, oppression, poverty and violence?
- h) To what extent will your church share with other churches in the apostolic mission?
- i) To what extent does your church share with other churches in faith formation and theological education?
- j) How fully can your church share in prayer with other churches?

Answers on a postcard to the Editor!

Yearly Meeting 2006

At Yearly Meeting this year we were pleased to welcome two visitors from other faith traditions, Douglas Nicholl from the Church of Scotland, and Daniel Otaha Mdale, who represents Black and Ethnic Minority Churches on the Interfaith Network.

Both visitors attended a special interest group organised by the Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations and commented enthusiastically about their experience of the YM sessions.

Daniel commented to the Editor that he was fascinated by the different ways that Friends expressed "I hope so" in the sessions. This is the second year that visitors from other churches and faiths have been invited to BYM and it has been agreed that there will be inter-church and inter-faith guests invited to every Yearly Meeting.

The worshippers of the Most
Glorious are those who tread the
earth gently, and when the ignorant
speak to them, they only utter,
'Peace'.

The Qur'an 25:63

Opinions in articles and letters are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent those of this committee.

Any contributions from Friends are welcome.

Neighbours

Kathleen Nelson, BYM Representative on Churches Spirituality Co-ordinating Group of Churches Together in England, writes:

Neighbours? is a challenging booklet for group discussion containing material for up to six sessions. The parable of the Good Samaritan is the starting point for an exploration of neighbours in a variety of contexts- the community, in Churches (Quaker Meetings) and in the wider faith community. The excellent introduction provides background material and draws out how we, too, can be changed by the parable just as the person in the story turns from victim into rescued person.

Written by Quaker Chris Cook for the Churches Spirituality Co-ordinating Group, this booklet is very Quaker friendly.

Available from: Churches Together in England, 27 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HH . Price £1 per copy (37p 2nd class postage), 10 copies post free

Rendering help to another is the function of all human beings.

Jainism Tattvarthasutra 5.21

From Brighthouse MM newsletter “Meeting Points”

Multifaith Picnic

On Sunday 11th June after Meeting for Worship on a beautiful summer afternoon, we hosted the Huddersfield Interfaith Council picnic, as part of an initiative throughout the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum area.

85 people attended from 6 faiths (plus Quakers) bringing food from their own faith traditions to share, and joining in flag-making, parachute games, collaborative juggling, music and, of course, eating. I think it must be the first time we've had a bishop's crook propped up against the meeting house.

Electronic and other formats

We hope to make CIRcular available to anyone with visual or reading difficulties, and also to reduce the number of paper copies. Please contact Marigold Bentley (address below) if you would like it by email, large print, or another format.

Useful Websites

www.sabeel.org.uk Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre

www.ctbi.org.uk Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

www.interfaith.org.uk Interfaith Network

www.wominet.co.uk Women's Interfaith Network

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Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations keeps Quakers in Britain informed of movements towards co-operation within the Christian Church and opportunities for interfaith dialogue, and it responds on their behalf to other churches and communities of faith.

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