

CIRcular



For Friends involved in local ecumenical and interfaith work

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Hall Green Churches Still Together

Friends at Hall Green Meeting in Birmingham are enthusiastic about their active involvement within Hall Green Churches Together over many years. At the present time one Friend is chair, another is secretary. Eight churches participate including C of E, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Baptist, URC and the Religious Society of Friends.

The group has always undertaken projects which the local meeting has been glad to be part of. For over 20 years it ran holidays for children from the Newtownabbey area of Belfast, both Protestant and Catholic. Friends were able to help with fundraising and by acting as hosts. Over the last few years Friends enlisted the support of the West Midlands Quaker Peace Education Project to contribute a day of mediation activities while the children stayed in an activity centre. This was much appreciated by all involved.

Another project is a credit union run by a Catholic laywoman which meets in a joint C of E/ Methodist Church and is supported by volunteers from all the churches, including Friends.

Members of all the churches have taken part in faith study courses; over the last few years Islam and Sikhism have been studied, and a local imam has come to speak about his mosque's multi-faith youth work. Lent courses are also popular, hosted by people in their own homes. Friends take part in both congregational and pulpit exchanges with much interest being taken in the Quaker form of worship.

Member churches have a written covenant which is renewed every 5 years. A statement at the end reads, "Although the Religious Society of Friends cannot accept any verbal statement as a basis of Christian unity, they nevertheless accept, and are accepted into, participation in this covenant".

The present chair, Quaker Pamela Williams is excited by Friends' involvement, but she says, "We have been saddened recently by the difficulties experienced by our Catholic friends in not being able to invite others to their sacramental services. This affects our congregational exchange, but we are pleased to be able to use the meeting house for Churches Together meetings and for Taize singing, even though our sensitive smoke alarms prevent the use of candles".



Pictured here are Pamela Williams (right), together with Marigold Bentley, secretary of OCCIR, who recently gave a talk on QPSW peace work world wide.

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.

Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship

Evelyn Shire of Leeds MM has been involved with Leeds Concord for several years. This is very different from the Leeds Faiths Forum which is a representative body putting forward faith community points of view to city Council.

Evelyn writes: What sustains us in Concord is friendships. Many people have known each other over a period of decades. There are risks that we are not representative of communities as a whole, and even that views of some of our individual members may be at odds with others in their faith communities. Some may feel more comfortable "interfaith" than with their "own". However, friendship strengths keep things going. This in itself is a benefit to the city, though the downside is that strong bonds of friendship can appear exclusive to newcomers and the core membership is not getting any younger. It is

very important that we are open to new, younger people, probably with some different ideas.

A focal point is our annual Peace service. Since 2001 this has been held at Carlton Hill Friends Meeting House. Friends host the event and everyone is happy with this venue as it is a place of worship (rather than civic building) but one which does not have visual representations which are difficult for some other faiths. The Lord Mayor of Leeds or a representative, regularly attends, marking this as an annual civic event.

Other meetings tend to consist of talks or discussions. We hope to initiate in Leeds an annual Interfaith Walk for Peace this summer. This would be a reflective walk through the city visiting several places of worship on the way.



The Concord Peace Service at Carlton Hill Meeting House attended by the Lord Mayor of Leeds in October 2005

Editorial

In this edition of CIRcular I have sought to reflect the experience of Friends who are involved in local interchurch or interfaith work. In some instances of interchurch work, Friends have found it difficult not to get bogged down in doctrinal or liturgical differences. For this reason I am very pleased to be able to highlight Friends' involvement over many years in Hall Green Churches Together, Birmingham.

I welcome contributions from other Friends. If you are doing something innovative or you have a concern about an aspect of interchurch or interfaith work, why not share it with other Friends through these pages?

Linda Pegler

A Council of Faiths for Middlesbrough

Michael Wright of Middlesbrough Meeting is Chair of the Middlesbrough Faith Communities Development Group.

In April 2005 a public meeting was held from which emerged the Development Group which has planned the constitution, and the contact relationships, which have produced now the final steps to set up a Council of Faiths in the town.

Michael writes: There are more than 80 places of worship in Middlesbrough – churches, mosques, a Hindu temple, Sikh gurdwara, and other places of worship and education. We have sought to publicise how they play a considerable part in the life of the community:

- Helping people live a life of faith and vision
- Marking key stages in people's lives: birth, marriage, and death
- Providing pastoral care, education, social programmes, and community service
- Working for justice and peace, locally, nationally and internationally
- Inspiring their members to work for the benefit of the wider community

We hope we can obtain funds to provide a Development Worker, with administrative support. We also aim to open an Inter-faith centre in central Middlesbrough – with a library and

resource centre, a place for informal meetings on neutral ground between people of different faiths, and a quiet, still space, for people to reflect, pray or just think in peace.

We also plan to share in some joint celebrations of faith, helping people to understand and (where they wish to) participate in the celebrations of other faiths. The development of a large open space in front of the Town Hall, which will be finished by the summer will we hope provide the opportunity for a joyous, colourful, and musical celebration of faith, and of the contribution people of all faiths make to the life of our community.

We are not seeking to pretend that all faiths are the same, or aiming at an amalgam of everyone. Each faith must be true to its own beliefs, practices, and life-style. We can learn much from one another, and can share with others some of the treasures we find in our own faith and practice.

Together we hope we can work for a better community life, threaded through with values from the greatest spiritual teachers and prophets from our human history.



Paganism

Many interfaith groups have Pagan members. A brief introduction to paganism is available from the Editor on request by email.

Changes in CTBI

From April 2006 Churches Together in Britain and Ireland will be much more closely integrated with the national ecumenical bodies for England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. It will aim to be less institutional and more relational, sustaining an environment of shared reflection and prayer. The new General Secretary is the Revd Canon Bob Fyffe, a minister of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

Set All Free

2007 is the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Set All Free is a project of Churches Together in England, www.setallfree.net There is also a wealth of material in Friends House Library on the history of the abolition of the Slave Trade.

Diversity and Dialogue

Convenors of young people's activities may be interested in the launch of a new website www.diversityanddialogue.org.uk

The website includes an online directory of projects taking place across the UK to increase understanding between young people from different faiths and backgrounds.

Ammerdown Exhibition

At the beginning of June 2006, Ammerdown Conference Centre, Radstock, Bath, Somerset, is to host an exhibition of art and craft entitled "In praise of the Divine".

This will be an interfaith venture, hopefully showing items of work of a joyful and lovingly peaceful nature, celebrating our spiritual interconnection and the light and wisdom central to all faiths. Further information from Sarah Linnell, an attendee at Frome Meeting: sarahlinnell@blueyonder.co.uk

OCCIR Day Conference

Book now for this exciting day conference at Woodbrooke on Saturday June 17th. Two women will address the conference on interfaith issues from the perspective of mothers and families

today in a multifaith country. To book contact Anne Wilkinson of QPSW annew@quaker.org.uk 020 7663 1062.

World Congress of Faiths

www.worldfaiths.org A very useful website. The WCF Anniversary Conference will be held on October 23-24 at the University of Birmingham.

Seeking the Transformation of a Fractured World

This is a major international conference at which papers will be presented by scholars from several different countries. Contact: Dr David Cheetham 0121 415 8335

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.

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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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