



Concord

LEEDS INTERFAITH FELLOWSHIP
www.concord-leeds.org.uk

Newsletter - April 2009

Faiths, the Environment & Concord

THE Concord **Annual General Meeting** will be held on Thursday May 28th at 7.15pm in the Friends' Meeting House, Woodhouse Lane.

Leeds Concord has had an excellent year of talks, visits and events and our success depends entirely on your support. We hope that next year will be even better which inevitably means more effort from you, the members.

The Executive Committee and Council of Faiths have worked hard to provide an interesting, informative and enjoyable programme and, as you will see, we have more lined up for the next few months.

One of the main items of business at the AGM will be the proposed revision of our Constitution, so please come along and have your say. Another is the election of Officers: if you have time to spare and skills to offer – finding speakers, organising visits, contacting different faith communities, publicising events, encouraging people to join, representing Concord – we would like you to volunteer your services.

Hopefully the business meeting won't take too long then we can hear Revd Charles Dobbin, Vice Chair of Leeds Faiths Forum, and Revd Ian White, Diocesan Environmental Officer, tell us about the recent LFF conference – Faiths and the Environment – and what Concord and our relevant faith communities can do next. (See page 8 for a report of the conference.)

Following the meeting we will have time for refreshments and opportunity for general conversation. Do come and join us.



Concord members with Imam Asim at the Makkah Mosque. See story page 5.

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Inter Faith Week

AN Inter Faith Week will take place from 15th to 21st November across England. It will include and highlight activities organised by bodies around the country designed to:

- strengthen good interfaith relations at all levels;
- encourage local faith groups and communities to reach out to each other and build stronger bonds of understanding and cooperation;
- increase awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the UK, with a particular focus on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society;
- gain positive profile for interfaith initiatives, locally, regionally and nationally as well as for the overall work of building good interfaith relations;
- increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs;
- encourage the development of new partnerships within local communities and by faith communities with statutory and third sector partners.

The Week is being facilitated by the Inter Faith Network for the UK, working

with its member bodies, in partnership with various government departments.

The Week will not be 'top down' with a programme of centrally organised or officially 'badged' events. It will be a week in which faith groups and their places of worship, interfaith bodies, schools and institutions of further and higher education, local authorities and other public agencies as well as others are encouraged to hold their own events and to highlight the importance of interfaith understanding and cooperation and greater awareness about the faith communities and their engagement in building community.

The possibility of the Week being marked in Wales as well as in England is under consideration. An annual Inter Faith Week already takes place in Scotland.

A website is being developed which will provide basic information about the Week and ideas for events and projects: www.interfaithweek.org.uk

Bradford Concord Interfaith Society & Bradford SACRE

ANNUAL LECTURE – 2009

'The Sacred in Art' by Nima Poovaya-Smith

Director of Alchemy

At the Interfaith Education Centre

Listerhills Road, Bradford BD7 1HD.

Thursday 21 May 2009 at 7:30pm

EVERYONE IS WELCOME

Refreshments Served After the Lecture

Treasures Revealed Again

TREASURES REVEALED in Leeds will take place between Saturday May 2nd and Sunday May 10th with a programme co-ordinated and publicised by an independent group of volunteers, people who have been active in previous years and, now that the 'funded' Treasures Revealed has moved out to West Yorkshire, are keen to see events continue in the Leeds Metropolitan District.

The group is relying on the generosity of participating places of worship, faith communities and organisations (such as Concord) to help cover basic administrative and printing costs.

Once again Concord's Walk of Friendship is the inaugural event, to be started off by the Lord Mayor of Leeds, Cllr Frank Robinson, and the programme ends with an ecumenical service at St Anne's Cathedral. Throughout the nine days 40 places will open their doors for the public to take a look inside, find out about beliefs and practices, see some of the 'treasured' decorations or artefacts and maybe take part in a service.



**TREASURES
REVEALED
in Leeds**

Behind the Wall



IN February Kath Harwood gave a thought-provoking talk on the lives of ordinary, every-day Palestinians 'Behind the Wall' in the area around Jerusalem and Bethlehem. When she became a pilgrim tour leader in 1994 she discovered how difficult things were for her Palestinian Christian friends and how it became even worse with the barrier constructed in 2002. Although the wall was intended to protect and separate Israelis from Palestinians, it actually separates Palestinian families and friends; farms from the water source; farmers from their fields; sick, pregnant and injured from hospitals. Ordinary people—teachers, farmers, doctors, shopkeepers—who would like to live in peace and with dignity have intolerable restrictions on their lives. On the positive side Kath did mention examples of Israelis and Palestinians—Jews, Muslims and Christians—working together for peace and justice. While it was agreed that Kath's talk was 'one-sided', many felt it was a side that needed to be heard if the situation is to be improved.

Cynthia Dickinson

Sacred on Location in Leeds

LEEDS Central Library during March was privileged to host the British Library's travelling programme entitled *Sacred on Location*, which highlighted the scriptures of the Abrahamic faiths with a number of colourful display panels and an interactive 'Turning the Pages' unit.

At the launch evening on 2nd March the gathering of some 70 people were welcomed by Catherine Blanshard, Chief Libraries, Arts & Heritage Officer, and Mr Roger Walshe, Head of Learning at the British Library.

The programme included Mr David Apfel, Jewish Cantor, The Harwood Singers, and Imam Hafiz Azim of Makkah Mosque giving a presentation of Islamic scriptures. Two short talks were also given by Mr Harbans Singh Sagoo, Chair of Leeds Faiths Forum, and the Revd Trevor Bates, Chair of Concord.

On Monday 16th March the second of three special evenings organised by the Central Library staff was publicised as a Forum occasion. Rabbi Jason Kleiman of the Street Lane Synagogue with the Revd Dr Albert Jewell, Methodist minister and former Chaplain to Leeds University (a Concord member) and Imam Hafiz Asim of Makkah Mosque, each gave introductory talks to highlight the commonalities of and the differences between the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Whilst the gathering was small, and disappointing for the Library staff, nevertheless it proved to be a very helpful, stimulating and rewarding evening for those who were present. Several challenging questions were addressed and stronger links of friendship made.

Trevor Bates

Patterns of Worship

THIS excellent ongoing series has continued with visits to Christian and Muslim places of worship to hear from members of those faiths about their practices.

Christian Worship

In January a sizeable group visited Oxford Place Methodist Centre to hear the Revd Dr Adrian Burdon describe the main points of Christian worship. Although there are many and varied denominations—Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Reformed, and their sub-groups—generally speaking in all traditions people sit together regardless of gender, age or race with the main points of focus being the cross, pulpit, font/baptistery, table/altar and lectern/reading desk. The services tend to consist of prayers, hymns/psalms, scripture reading and Eucharist, with the latter being the central part of Christian worship. The Eucharist, Holy Communion with the breaking of bread, comes directly from the Jewish Passover, reinvigorated by Jesus. For the first 1500 years the pattern stayed more or less the same;

however there were quite marked changes in the last 500 years after the Reformation, even more in the past 50 years. Nowadays services are in the native language of the congregation (rather than Latin) and may follow quite distinct formats. Some denominations celebrate the Eucharist occasionally while others (eg Salvation Army) don't include it at all.

Services usually consist of gathering together to acknowledge God's presence; reflection upon weaknesses—confession; hearing the Word—Bible reading and sermon; response, intercession; challenge—charging the congregation to go out and take the message.

The liturgical year consists of:

- Advent —preparing for Christmas; Christmas and Epiphany, celebrating the birth of Christ;
- Lent—penitential preparation, special study groups;
- Holy Week—Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday;
- Pentecost—the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples.



Muslim Worship

March saw about 20 members visiting the Makkah Masjid, where Imam Hazif Asim explained some of the features around worship in Islam. Muslims believe that the Prophet Mohammed was taken to Heaven by the Angel Gabriel; this was his Ascension when he saw God and was given the gift of prayer. For believers 'Ascension' is to perform prayer in a way that brings them closest to God. It is compulsory for Muslims to pray five times a day—before sunrise, at noon, in the afternoon, at sunset and at night. Before praying they must perform ablutions by washing their hands, face and feet, a preparation that is both physical and psychological.

After the call to prayer they all stand together and face the direction of Makkah; it is considered appropriate for all Muslims to face the same direction. The five prayers are congregational with the imam leading, though some may perform voluntary prayers beforehand. There are specific ways to stand and actions to make during the prayers. These were described and illustrated

by a series of slides. The prayers are said in Arabic, reciting passages from the Qu'ran, and the movements are a form of discipline, designed to focus the attention on glorifying God. When seated, the congregation states that all actions are to God, they address the Prophet and the congregation (even if praying alone), asking for peace and remembering the whole Muslim community. There is a declaration of faith with blessings sent to Muhammad and Ibrahim, after which individuals make their own personal prayers in their own language. Finally they turn to the right, saying 'Peace be with you', then the same to the left.

There may be a separate room, hall or balcony for women; otherwise they stand behind the men to pray; many will say their prayers at home.

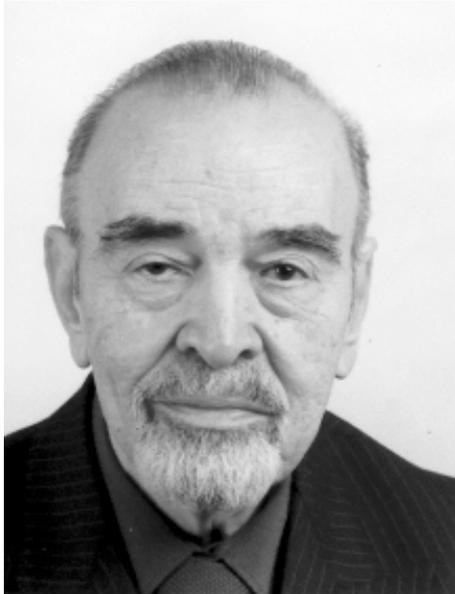
There was the call to evening prayer while we were there, so while our hosts attended prayers we were given refreshments. The evening ended with a tour of the mosque. The Makkah Masjid is opening as part of Treasures Revealed.

Cynthia Dickinson



HAMED PAKROOH

Interviewed by Trevor Bates on 17th March 2009



THE Bahá'í contribution to the life of Concord has mainly been made by the Pakrooh family. It was not until the 1980s that we were fortunate enough to become aware of the Bahá'í community in Leeds. Only then did some of us begin to realise how far reaching the vision for our world and humanity are the aims and ideals of this socially progressive world-wide faith community which has its origins in Iran.

Hamed Pakrooh's grandparents moved from Tehran to Russia in the 19th century, and both Hamed's parents and himself were born there. However, after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 great changes were being made in Russian society, and in the 1930s the Government of the USSR required people of Iranian origin either to apply for citizenship or to leave the country.

Profile

5th in a series of interviews
with members of Concord

This meant that the Pakrooh family returned to live in Tehran and from 7½ years old Hamed's schooling and formal education began. After graduating from high school, he applied successfully to enter medical school in Tehran and completed his training as a doctor for general practice in 1957.

Hamed's early years in medicine involved him first as a houseman in local hospitals and then to work for the World Health Organisation in its Malaria Eradication Programme in different areas of Iran. In 1960 he married his wife Farah, and they both moved to Holland where Hamed secured a place to do general surgery at Leyden University Medical School. Hamed and Farah remained in Holland for four years so that Hamed could complete his training as a surgeon. During that time their eldest daughter Azita was born.

Hamed then sought opportunity to move to London in order to gain greater experience as a surgeon, his intention being that after a couple of years they would then return to Iran. For four years Hamed worked in London hospitals, and then was offered a job opportunity for six months at St James's Hospital, Leeds. He decided to accept this new opportunity which by extensions of six more months, and then annually for a couple of years, led finally to the offer of a permanent post. So Hamed remained for 27 years in the Accident and Emergency Ward of St James's, and has lived in Leeds ever since. Here in Leeds Hamed and Farah had two more children—a daughter, Mina and a son, Ramin. After Hamed's mother died in Iran, Hamed arranged for his

father to come to Leeds to be nearer for care and support, until his death here in 1981.

Both Farah and Hamed come from families who have followed the Bahá'í faith for several generations. Here in Leeds they are totally committed to the Leeds Bahá'í congregation, which meets as per Bahá'í practice every 19 days for the Feast occasion. Since Hamed's semi-retirement, both he and Farah have been on pilgrimage for several years to the Mansion of Bahji (the resting place of Bahá'u'lláh) at Acre, and to the Shrine of the Báb in Haifa, Israel.

However, it was whilst Azita was a student at Sheffield University that she took an interest in Concord and became the means whereby Concord members

could begin to know more about the Bahá'í way of faith. As a result of Azita's commendation of Concord's aims, Hamed joined us around 1984/5 and with Farah his wife has remained with us ever since. Perhaps it is because Bahá'í members are required to accept previous religions and messengers of faith that Hamed and Farah feel very much at home with Concord.

Hamed has represented the Bahá'í community in various ways in Leeds, but he serves Concord on the joint Executive and Council of Faiths meeting, and is a vital member of our gatherings. Farah and Hamed's presence with us enriches our gatherings and we treasure their contribution to our inter-faith life and witness in Leeds.

Walk of Friendship 2009

COME and join us on our 4th Annual Walk of Friendship, this time in the Armley area of west Leeds. This is an opportunity for people in and around Armley, and further afield, to meet with people of different faiths, learn about their beliefs and practices, enjoy walking and talking together as we visit their places of worship. We are meeting at the Holy Family RC Church on Green Lane (just off Tong Road) with a welcome from the Lord Mayor of Leeds, Cllr Frank Robinson, at 11.50 am. Our rainbow banners will lead the procession as we walk between different venues. The Lord Mayor will start us on our way at 12.30.

There is limited car-parking near the church but a large car-park at the Gurdwara further along Tong Road and more space by St Bartholomew's Church, where the walk ends in the nearby Parish Hall. Local councillor Jim McKenna has volunteered to run a shuttle service from St Bartholomew's to Holy Family Church for those who need to save their strength for the walk.



The distances between places of worship are generally short, the longest being from the Gurdwara (at 1.30pm after lunch) up through the cemetery to St Bartholomew's. You are welcome to join or leave the walk at any time—just look out for the rainbow banner to see where we are. A copy of the route and timetable is included with this newsletter.

Both Concord and Treasures Revealed would like to know how many people take part in the event, so please look out for someone with a clipboard and add your name to the list. If you would like to volunteer as a 'name collector' or 'walk steward', please let me know.

Looking forward to seeing lots of you there.

Cynthia

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LFF Interfaith Conference on the Environment

at Leeds Metropolitan University, 15 March 2009

A most successful conference was held when 80 people from six faiths—Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Pagan and Sikh — engaged with crucial aspects of the crisis of our environment. We heard first from the Rt Hon John Battle MP, who spoke on local, community, national and global aspects of the Environment. Then speakers from the six faiths spoke of their understanding of the environment from the point of view of their faith. This was followed by five workshops, and then a presentation by John Cummins of the Leeds Groundwork Project on how we could be immediately involved in environmental work in Leeds.

The urgency of the threat to our environment through global warming was recognised by all, with both speakers and workshop leaders emphasising how people of faith should make this issue a priority.

There was a remarkable amount in common at a profound level between the six faiths and, without any attempt to harmonise the approaches of the different faiths, each representative clearly outlined their faith's basic beliefs and how they would be brought to bear on the environment issue. The resonance between their views was striking. The urgency of the environmental crisis went to the heart of each faith represented.

An integral link between our morality and the state of the environment was highlighted in:

- issues of justice, where the poor suffer disproportionately from the effects of global warming;
- a basic respect for the creation of which we are a part;
- disillusionment with the economic system and the attitudes of greed which have contributed to the present recession;

- recognition of the role of women;
- recognition of the importance of the local.

The recognition of the seriousness of the threat to the environment and also the degree of similar spiritual attitude suggested great potential for dialogue and joint action among people of different faiths for the good of our shared world. The conference has provided a first step for concerted action between the faiths in Leeds in tackling environment issues.

If you want to do something straight away, there is an opportunity for a multi-faith clean-up activity on Sunday April 19th. As part of the Pagan Federation's Earth Day event, Jay is organising a litter-picking session along the banks of the Aire-Calder canal, Stourton. Meet in the car park by Thwaite Mills Museum at 2.00 pm.

Then on Saturday May 9th, from 10.30am to 4.00 pm, Schumacher North is hosting an interactive symposium—*Be The Change*—at the Swarthmore Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tickets cost £25 (£15 concession) including lunch, tea and coffee, available from:

Swarthmore Centre
0113 2432210
info@swarthmore.org.uk.

For further information contact
David Midgely on
0113 2627914
info@schumacher-north.co.uk.

Charles Dobbin
Vice Chair of Leeds Faiths Forum

**Christian Learning Programme Workshop
on the theme of One World, Many Faiths**
at the Potternewton Centre, Potternewton View LS7 2DW
Saturday July 18th from 6pm to 9pm
Starting with a vegetarian/vegan meal.
Guest speakers needed – to talk about changing from
Christianity to another faith
Contact Noel Moules e-mail: office@anvil.org.uk
Tel: 01142888816