

FAITHS TOGETHER IN CROYDON NEWSLETTER ITEM

WORLD RELIGION DAY - RADIO INTERVIEW

FTiC was invited to participate in a radio dialogue on the significance of world religion day and interfaith dialogue going out live on the Voice of Islam radio broadcast on both DAB and internet services at 7.30am as part of the breakfast show.

World religion day was started post WW2 in 1950 by Bahai believers in USA to celebrate the validity of all world religions in an attempt to reduce animosity and supremacy issues and achieve a peaceful, respectful co existence and unification of religion.

This post war period saw the establishment of the United Nations with the civil goal of peaceful co operation with religious freedom. This is an ongoing goal yet to be achieved.

Interfaith dialogue has evolved from both the religious and civil desires expressed post WW2 and the interview reflected this desire.

The interview started with the host outlining the Ahmadiyya Muslim position on interfaith dialogue and desire for peaceful co operation in society and the regular actions they take to further this goal. An annual peace conference held at the Baital Futuh mosque in Morden, local interfaith dialogues and fund raising for local charities working in the community. All this and more with the objective of enabling dialogue sharing the core principles of religions, deepening understanding of each others view of the spiritual aspects of life.

I was then invited to comment and introduced myself as vice chair of Faiths together in Croydon, brought up as an Anglican Christian who without being directly active in interfaith activity, had a general interest in the spiritual side of life and other belief systems. Asian religions were particularly fascinating and by chance I met a work colleague who though English was a practising Buddhist and gradually saw that spiritual approach fitted my current life situation better, that was over thirty years ago.

Interfaith activity for me became a gradual involvement with small ad hoc groups in Croydon and Streatham. Simple dialogue and sharing events with no specific theme just spending time and exploring thoughts.

Around 2005 Croydon was identified as a diverse and significantly religious borough with many small independent interfaith connections. A community meeting was held and Faiths Together in Croydon was created as a borough wide umbrella organisation with the intention of spreading best practice, sharing ideas and acting as a catalyst for new bolder actions with health, police and council connections. The fundamental driving principle to be RESPECT for all.

Returning briefly to World Religion Day, interfaith has a similar goal without the unification of belief but unification of action in society based on shared religious values without the animosity toward differing belief systems. Animosity is reduced by regular dialogue and recognition of each faith's incorporation of the spiritual aspect creating human life rather than just existence. With the wider existence of Interfaith groups nationally a week of activity is celebrated across the country in November as National Inter Faith Week.

A question was then posed about the Covid 19 pandemic and its impact on interfaith activity.

Obviously face to face dialogue is best means for interfaith action to occur but it is an ongoing long term goal, Covid 19 is an immediate issue and must take the forefront in our actions. We have run some meetings and events via zoom but sparingly, our focus being more on faith groups looking after their own communities as a priority, and maintaining and reinforcing social distancing, mask use etc.

We have a website which we use to promote and disseminate local developments on Covid 19 issues as well as government guidelines, health warnings and other information for religious groups across the borough, to provide easy access to the information available in one place. This together with encouragement to see this issue resolved by collective action and a return to a more normal life as soon as possible.

An unexpected effect of the pandemic and lock downs and the few on line events we have organised, is the engagement of a wider audience particularly a Black Lives Matter conversation and a youth event, possibly due to the use of on line tech which is something we may add into the future mix of events.

There followed some comments from an Islamic studio guest Shazeb (apologies if the spelling is wrong)

Interfaith dialogue helps build bridges with the objective of harmonious

living with those around us.

A fundamental principle is “choose for your brothers what you choose for yourselves”.

A lack of peace leads to “anxiety of the heart”

Education, respect and tolerance, plus recognition of those who advance peace. A reference to the annual Peace Award by the Ahmadiyya Muslim organisation.

Misunderstanding of base texts without interpretation creates violence, aggression and intolerance.

Dialogue clarifies what Islam and other religions are really about.