



Andrew Letby, Superintendent Minister

Croydon Methodist Church

When I tell people that I have recently moved from Edinburgh to take up the role of Methodist Superintendent in Croydon, the usual response is 'wow, it must be very different here'. I haven't yet worked out what people have in mind when they say that, but I can say that the physical environment is different, the weather is warmer, and the trams are much, much better! In more general terms life is faster paced and more intense. Church life is different too, my own being much less obviously Methodist than I used to and therefore unsure of its role in the context of a very diverse and constantly changing church environment. I have a sense that the faith communities relate to one another in a more cautious way, which as someone who has seen dialogue and mutual support as entirely natural feels sad and difficult.

My own 'inter-faith journey' began as young RE teacher taking my 'O' level students on a weekend exploring the faith communities of Birmingham. I found a photograph of the group the other day and it reminded me of how these young people were excited and energised by their discoveries of diversity, colour and stories of faith and devotion. When I later entered ministry in the Methodist Church I soon found myself seeking out the communities of faith in the places I was sent. This included during my period as chaplain at Newcastle Airport where I facilitated the opening of a prayer room available to people of all faiths. It was a joy sometimes to find Christians and Muslims at prayer at the same time in the same small space. More recently in Scotland, my church was host to the offices of Edinburgh Interfaith Association and community meals drawing many faiths together were cooked and served in our church café. Edinburgh Churches Together was a paid-up member of the Interfaith Association and we worked on common initiatives. Most significantly I proposed and developed a multi faith chaplaincy service in the Sheriff Courts (the equivalent of Magistrates Court in England). Volunteers from several faith groups provided a listening ear every day of the week, and the service now number 40+ chaplains.

In the last few months I have completed the Cambridge University Senior faith Leadership Programme, which annually brings together 7 leaders from each of the Abrahamic faiths to learn together and develop dialogue. A key part of that programme is the introduction to 'Scriptural Reasoning' in which we studied one another's sacred texts in a critical but non-judgemental way.

I look forward to learning more about the diversity of Croydon and the opportunities to serve and learn together. Perhaps we could share in some Scriptural Reasoning as a step toward better understanding and debate.

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