

**29th Annual
Multi-Faith
Pilgrimage
for Peace
2014**

**Saturday
14th June**

**In
Haringey
North
London**

**Starting at
Our Lady of
Muswell,
RC Church,
Muswell
Hill**

At 9.15 am

Book now!
More details on
page 3 and in
the enclosed
flyer

Rejoice

We rejoice, thank God and Pope Francis for choosing Archbishop Vincent as our new Cardinal and for the appointment of new bishops, including Fr. Nicholas Hudson as Auxiliary Bishop for Westminster. Let us pray for them in their new ministry.

I rejoice in receiving messages of support as well as cheques to help cover the costs of the Newsletter. It felt like Christmas again! But we are still short!

Just over a year ago, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio was installed as Pope Francis, Bishop of Rome. We were all very excited. I rejoiced when he welcomed church and interreligious leaders almost immediately and treated them as family. He touched their hearts straight away. All were keen to meet him again. Many did on his first anniversary.

I was in Rome with Christians of different denominations, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs at an inter-religious

gathering at Castel Gandolfo, when, on the feast of St Joseph, 20 faith leaders met Pope Francis briefly at his residence in Casa Santa Marta just after breakfast. He was happy to see them again. He greeted each one warmly and encouraged them to go ahead together. They rejoiced.

During this period, I was struck how few people were aware of the many religious feasts that were being celebrated: Purim, Holi, Higan, Zoroastrian and Baha'i New Year: Jamsheedi Noruz and Naw-Ruz, etc. These festivals offer excellent opportunities for dialogue, greetings and making friends. Knowing about them can avoid embarrassment and misunderstanding as happened to a politician recently. There are many important festivals between Easter and Ramadan. Don't miss the chance of reaching out to people of other faiths, sharing your own festivals and rejoicing with them.

Happy Easter! Happy Ridvan!

Jon

Pope Francis on Interreligious Dialogue

In his first Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis includes a section on interreligious dialogue. It appears in Chapter Four: The Social Dimension of Evangelization, under the heading: Social Dialogue as a contribution to Peace. In it, he identifies three areas

of dialogue where the Church needs to be present in order to promote full human development and to pursue the common good. One area is inter-religious dialogue to which he devotes five paragraphs. It is

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Pope Francis on Interreligious Dialogue

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worth reading them carefully and prayerfully, meditating on the content and putting the ideas into practice. Here they are:

An attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions, in spite of various obstacles and difficulties, especially forms of fundamentalism on both sides. Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities. This dialogue is in first place a conversation about human existence or simply, as the bishops of India have put it, a matter of “being open to them, sharing their joys and sorrows”. In this way we learn to accept others and their different ways of living, thinking and speaking. We can then join one another in taking up the duty of serving justice and peace, which should become a basic principle of all our exchanges. A dialogue which seeks social peace and justice is in itself, beyond all merely practical considerations, an ethical commitment which brings about a new social situation. Efforts made in dealing with a specific theme can become a process in which, by mutual listening, both parts can be purified and enriched. These efforts, therefore, can also express love for truth.

In this dialogue, ever friendly and sincere, attention must always be paid to the essential bond between dialogue and proclamation, which leads the Church to maintain and intensify her relationship with non-Christians. A facile syncretism would ultimately be a totalitarian gesture on the part of those who would ignore greater values of which they are not the masters. True openness involves remaining steadfast in one’s deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one’s own identity, while at the same time being “open to understanding those of the other party” and “knowing that dialogue can enrich each side”. What is not helpful is a diplomatic openness which says “yes” to everything in order to avoid problems, for this would be a way of deceiving others and denying them the good which we have been given to share generously with others. Evangelization and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support and nourish one another.

Our relationship with the followers of Islam has taken on great importance, since they are now significantly present in many traditionally Christian countries, where they can freely worship and become fully a part of society. We must never forget that they “profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, who will judge humanity on the last day”. The sa-

cred writings of Islam have retained some Christian teachings; Jesus and Mary receive profound veneration and it is admirable to see how Muslims both young and old, men and women, make time for daily prayer and faithfully take part in religious services. Many of them also have a deep conviction that their life, in its entirety, is from God and for God. They also acknowledge the need to respond to God with an ethical commitment and with mercy towards those most in need.

In order to sustain dialogue with Islam, suitable training is essential for all involved, not only so that they can be solidly and joyfully grounded in their own identity, but so that they can also acknowledge the values of others, appreciate the concerns underlying their demands and shed light on shared beliefs. We Christians should embrace with affection and respect Muslim immigrants to our countries in the same way that we hope and ask to be received and respected in countries of Islamic tradition. I ask and I humbly entreat those countries to grant Christians freedom to worship and to practice their faith, in light of the freedom which followers of Islam enjoy in Western countries! Faced with disconcerting episodes of violent fundamentalism, our respect for true followers of Islam should lead us to avoid hateful generalisations, for authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Koran are opposed to every form of violence.

Non-Christians, by God’s gracious initiative, when they are faithful to their own consciences, can live “justified by the grace of God”, and thus be “associated to the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ”. But due to the sacramental dimension of sanctifying grace, God’s working in them tends to produce signs and rites, sacred expressions which in turn bring others to a communitarian experience of journeying towards God. While these lack the meaning and efficacy of the sacraments instituted by Christ, they can be channels which the Holy Spirit raises up in order to liberate non-Christians from atheistic immanentism or from purely individual religious experiences. The same Spirit everywhere brings forth various forms of practical wisdom which help people to bear suffering and to live in greater peace and harmony. As Christians, we can also benefit from these treasures built up over many centuries, which can help us better to live our own beliefs.

Pope Francis: Evangelii Gaudium

29th Annual Multi-Faith Pilgrimage for Peace

Thanks to Sister Elizabeth, our Interfaith Co-ordinator in North London, the 29th Annual Multi-Faith Pilgrimage for Peace will take place on Saturday 14th June in the Borough of Haringey, around Muswell Hill, Hornsey and Crouch End. We shall be visiting a number of religious groups in the area: including Christian: Catholic, Moravian; Quaker, Jewish, Baha'i, Muslim and Sikh.

The idea for this pilgrimage was born when a small group of young Sufi Muslims came on the annual pilgrimage in Hertfordshire last year and asked us if we had ever been to Crouch End. Well, we hadn't and it seemed like a good idea. I also knew someone, who offered to help, if we ever decided to organize a pilgrimage around Muswell Hill. Sister Elizabeth knew people in the area and had taken part in a walk of witness and solidarity when the Bravanese Somali Centre was burnt down last summer. In short, it seemed like a good idea.

The annual pilgrimage this year will be quite different from last year, when we hired coaches and travelled around West Hertfordshire visiting different places of worship.

This year, we will be in a much smaller area where we shall walk and or use public transport. It will have an ecumenical and multi-religious aspect to it. We shall visit two Christian churches at which we shall meet different faith groups, who either do not have their own place of worship or, if they do, it's too small to accommodate a large group of pilgrims. We'll also be visiting two Islamic Centres; one Sunni, the other Sufi. We'll be attending a Shabbat service at a local Orthodox synagogue.

We shall gather and start from the RC church of Our Lady of Muswell, on the site of what used to be a regular place of pilgrimage during the Middle Ages until the shrine was destroyed during the reign of Henry VIII.

To Book a place on the Pilgrimage

For security reasons, catering and logistics, we ask you to register with us as soon as possible. Send email to me: jondaldin@rcdow.org.uk; or Sister Elizabeth at eodonohoe@btinternet.com; OR Complete booking form and return it to us. If you would like further information, flyers, etc. please include a stamped self-addressed envelope.. Thank you.

Address: Our Lady of Muswell (OLM), 1 Colney Hatch Lane, Muswell Hill, London N10 1PN.

Our Lady of Muswell is in TFL zone 3.

Buses 43, 102, 134, 234 and 299 stop almost outside the church. Buses 144, 299 and W7 terminate at Muswell Hill Broadway, which is 3-5 minutes walk away, down Colney Hatch Lane.

Nearest stations: Bounds Green, Turnpike Lane (Piccadilly Line); Highgate, East Finchley (Northern Line); Hornsey (Rail); Finsbury Park.

From **Highgate Station** (Northern Line) Take Bus 43 towards Friern Barnet or Bus 134 towards North Finchley. Alight at Meadow Drive / Colney Hatch Lane bus stop.

From **Brent Cross / Golders Green** (Northern Line) take Bus 102 towards Edmonton Green and alight at Meadow Drive; Bus 143 towards Archway. Get off at East Finchley station, cross road and follow directions from East Finchley..

East Finchley (Northern Line) Take Bus 102 towards Edmonton Green; Bus 234 towards Barnet. Alight at Meadow Road / Colney Hatch Lane.

From **Bounds Green** (Piccadilly Line) Take Bus 102 towards Brent Cross or Bus 299 towards Muswell Hill Broadway. Alight at Colney Hatch Lane.

From **Hornsey / Turnpike Lane**, take Bus 144 to Muswell Hill Broadway.

From **Finsbury Park**, best to take Piccadilly Line to Bounds Green and follow directions from there or take Bus W7 from outside the station to Muswell Hill Broadway. Walk down Colney Hatch Lane.

Provisional Timetable

9.15 Meet at Our Lady of Muswell Church Hall;
 9.50 Depart for nearby synagogue to attend part of Shabbat service;
 11.45 Return to Our Lady of Muswell Church Hall for a presentation by the local Quakers; Lunch provided by Sachkhand Nanak Dham, our Sikh friends; Exchange of gifts and thanks.
 1.30 Depart for Moravian Church;
 2.15 Welcome by Pastor Joachim and Moravians;
 2.30 Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is;
 3.00 Depart for London Islamic Centre, Hornsey
 3.30 Visit Hornsey Mosque and refreshments;
 4.30 Depart Mosque
 5.15 Visit Crouch End Sufi Centre.
 6.15 Join in Crouch End Festival.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) is held each year on 27th January - the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi concentration and extermination camp. HMD was introduced in 2002 to remember those who suffered and died at the hands of the Nazis during the Second World War as well as subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. The Day helps to ensure no such atrocity happens again. It reminds us what can happen if we do not take personal and collective responsibility for tackling racism and other forms of bigotry. Commemorative ceremonies and services were held up and down the country on the day or before it. Some people held services, outside by the local Cenotaph, others were held inside, mainly in town halls and synagogues. I'm sure there were ceremonies and services also in other places of worship. Wherever the services were held, most included people of different faiths.

HMD ceremony at City Hall

The London Assembly chose to commemorate HMD the week before on Monday 20th January. At 11am, a ceremony took place in the Chamber of City Hall. The audience included Mayors and Council leaders from local boroughs as well as many invited guests, especially from the Jewish community, but also from other faiths. We had to register in advance for the event. Maybe just as well because there was not a spare seat to be found. There was quite a buss. Darren Johnson, Chair of the London Assembly, welcomed everybody and introduced the theme for this year: Journeys.

Steven Frank was the first speaker. He told us of his experiences in Holland under Nazi occupation from 1941-44. His recollection of the events and the journeys he undertook, as a very young boy, were so vivid that we lived through them with him. His father and other members of his family died in Auschwitz.

Boris Johnson, Mayor of London, read an extract from *If not now, when* by Primo Levi who recounts his own experience of traveling from Auschwitz back to Italy. Then three six formers shared their experience of traveling to Auschwitz with the Holocaust Educational Trust and the effect it had on them. Other six formers from local schools stood to make a Statement of Commitment, in which they pledged to continue to promote education and research about the Holocaust and genocide and condemn the evils of prejudice,

discrimination and racism.

Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner, whose family managed to escape the persecution by the Nazis, told us of her first trip back to her family's homeland: Lithuania, where thousands of Jews perished. The Rabbi led *Kaddish*, the Memorial Prayer, in English and Hebrew.

Sophie Masereka told us how she, as a young girl, "miraculously" was the only survivor of her family from the Rwandan Genocide, which claimed about one million victims. Together with Steven Frank, they lit the memorial candle. Sophie Solomon, artistic director of the Jewish Music Institute performed *Sholem Aleichem* by Israel Goldfarb on the violin, accompanied by a guitarist.

It was a very moving sensitively organized ceremony, which concluded with refreshments, mainly Kosher, on the lower ground map area.

HMD service at the West London Synagogue

The event at the West London Synagogue (WLS) was held on the eve of HMD, on Sunday 26th January, which was Australia Day and World Leprosy Day. It was very different in style, format and atmosphere but similar in content to the ceremony at City Hall. The service was open to anybody, who wished to attend. It was only necessary to book for the drama performance afterwards.

The lower floor slowly filled with people from different ethnic and religious traditions, all with heads covered. There was almost complete silence as people found their places. The synagogue team had prepared a prayerful and solemn service, sensitively led by Rabbi Helen Freeman. Nearly everyone joined in the responses and the songs led by an excellent cantor. Some participants lit candles to acknowledge the suffering of various communities, including Rwanda, Darfur, Congo and Egyptian Coptic Christians. All were then invited to light a candle for a particular intention. Many did. It was a very moving moment. The service concluded with Bob Dylan's, 'A hard rain's a-gonna fall' while we made our way to the reception area for refreshments and to meet and talk to one another. Many stayed on to listen to the performance of Readings from Eva Hoffman's, *The Ceremony*, set in the Polish village of Jędrzejów in 1941, where more than 340 Jews perished.

Jon

Brother Daniel's Diary (31)

Thanking God ... Praising God

- All the prayers of the Christians, all of them heavy with demands, the demands of life, suffering, anxiety, frustration or lightened with the joys of life, for graces received, for joys and pleasures received.
- All the sermons preached, written, thought about (for a week or for a few minutes?), prayed over, inspired by a zealous life, close to the altar and the people, by personal suffering, quest, doubts, insights...
- All the sermons of the Pentecostals, heavy on scripture, delivered with energy, translated into loud words and sweat.
- All the bhajans, repeated, reaching a crescendo, inducing some sort of a trance where the devotee enters into a communion with the Lord.
- All the enthusiastic hymns of the Methodists and the Evangelicals
- All the incense, the ringing of bells, the pouring of milk on lingas, on the feet of images,
- All the offerings, the fruit, the money, some of it small, some of it ostentatiously given, some of it ill gained, some of it really needed for food and children's wear.
- In baskets, in iron boxes with padlocks. Why padlocks? Are we afraid that God will lift it? or are we afraid of ourselves, tempted by the Lord's money?

- In envelopes with covenants. The best Catechesis is often made when people preach about covenants... I mean the way it is done, how there are pencils about, where the envelopes are.. I mean the method... and how it is followed up. My neighbour (the Anglican Church next to Br Daniel's house) has a sign on his front door: "No collection is made during services". So much can be said about for and against money and the temple that I don't know why I started writing about this subject (!).

- Yes, praising the Lord with the cymbals of the Salvation Army, the clapping of hands of the Pentecostals in their Sunday best, flowered hats and carefully pressed suits.....murmuring, humming the words of the hymns sung by the Granthis.

- I walk in my mind with the elderly making their weekly visit to the Gurdwara, one hand on a walking stick, the other holding a plastic bag with offerings.

- It is a long way from the Golden Temple... Now one must be in cramped accommodation, enduring the loud music of TV or radio, maybe the cold, the isolation, the pain of having seen the extended family breaking apart.

Alfred Agius

Conference of World Religions

The conference was organised by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in the UK, as part of its 125th Anniversary celebrations. It took place on Tuesday 11th February 2014 at the famous Guildhall in the City of London. The theme was '*God in the 21st Century*'. Around 500 delegates attended, including faith leaders from various countries, politicians, government officials, members of the diplomatic corps, academics and representatives of various NGOs. There were also messages of support from Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Prime Minister David Cameron and several other dignitaries.

Thirteen faith leaders considered what role religion could play in today's world and whether religion continued to be a force for good. His Holiness Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, the World Head and Fifth Khalifa of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community delivered the keynote address. He highlighted that all the major religions taught worship of God and love and compassion for mankind. He said that

if these original teachings were upheld today it would lead to a harmonious society, free from conflict and war. He also condemned governments across the world for prioritizing defense and military spending above and beyond social welfare and humanitarian projects.

I was surprised and delighted to see so many people present at the Conference and by the range of speakers of different faiths, including our own Archbishop Kevin McDonald, who seemed very happy to be there, sitting next to His Holiness, the Khalifa. He gave a short talk and read a message from Cardinal Turkson from Ghana, who is President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. I think it's a sign of the times. Despite the difficulties and divisions that exist throughout the world, it is apparent that the world wants and needs harmony and mutual respect between all people irrespective of creed, race, culture or traditions. It was a very joyful and sociable occasion.

Jon

The Role of Intellect in Religion

Milad al-Nabi marks the anniversary of the birth of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him and his family). To commemorate this anniversary, the Ismaili Centre, in South Kensington, hosts an annual lecture on a particular topic of the life and teachings of the Holy Prophet. The 2014 Lecture was on the Role of Intellect in Religion. It was delivered by Professor Ziauddin Sardar.

At a reception before the talk, we had the opportunity to meet the hosts, invited guests and the lecturer as well as taste savoury snacks and imbibe colourful non-alcoholic beverages. It was a pleasure to meet people I knew and many I did not know. On these occasions, people are always friendly and courteous. I was particularly impressed by the large number of volunteers who were in attendance to welcome us and attend to our needs. It says so much about their faith and commitment.

As always, in a Muslim setting, we started with a prayer, chanted from the Quran. Professor Sardar was introduced and he immediately stated that there was no concept of blasphemy in the Quran. He was referring to certain Islamic states where blasphemy, against God or the Prophet, is a crime, often punishable by death. He then criticized certain followers of Islam for misinterpreting their faith by modelling themselves too narrowly on the Prophet and the Quran, in the way they dressed and behaved. "The best way to honour the Prophet", he said was to see him as a human being in a particular context. [S.18.1.10 / 17.93]. The Prophet, therefore, has no special powers, however, he is a spiritual and meditative person, leader of Islam. He was unlettered and uneducated and lived in an oral society, where tradition was carried on through stories. As a young man Muhammad belonged to a group of 'truth seekers' made up of Jews, Christians and others. Then he became a prophet, when he read the first words of Revelation and he was told three times to read and each time the Prophet replied that he does not read but added: "what shall I read and how shall I read". "Read in the name of God who created the universe", was the reply. "Read to discover what you do not know."

Professor Sardar gave this introduction in order to point out that both the life of the Messenger and the Message were about the use of Intellect. He recounted five incidents from the life of the Prophet to illustrate his point. I only remember the following: the migration to Medina, where

the Prophet exercised his **intellect** in **planning** and writing the Constitution of Medina, which included all faiths and none and established the principle of equality before the law; three battles, in which the Prophet exercised the power of **strategy**. Professor Sardar pointed out that they were not really battles, because two only lasted a couple of hours and the third never took place because the attackers got dispirited by a terrible storm and left; the Prophet's trip to Mecca, where he encountered opposition and disagreement from the ruling Quaraish but he showed his ability to **compromise** in order to create peace and a better future; he also pardoned his enemies and detractors, thereby demonstrating **forgiveness**.

"Using these examples of the Prophet is honouring the Prophet and following his example", the professor said. He continued by saying that we need to re-interpret the life and message of the Prophet in the light of 21st century society, not as it was in his day. Once we use our intellect, we realize how little we know. We are still learning. Time and circumstances change, Revelation does not change. We turn to the Holy Quran for guidance and spiritual nourishment. A certain interpretation of Sharia law is no longer valid in today's society. Law is not static. Everything evolves, including morals.

In the brief question and answer session, we touched on a variety of topics, including the significance of being a Muslim in today's society and on faith and reason, which it would have been good to develop. In a way, Professor Sardar dealt with them in his talk. Beliefs should not lead to irrational acts. Knowing when to compromise and when to forgive is essential.

It was an excellent, refreshing and inspiring lecture. I'm not sure all Muslims would agree with his point of view. Unfortunately, I left my writing materials in my coat, which was hanging up in the cloakroom. All I had on me was the stub of a worn-out pencil and the invitation card. So my notes were very skimpy.

After the lecture, I stayed on for a guided tour with a small group of guests. That too was very interesting and worthwhile., although it meant getting home very late. The whole of the building was designed in accordance with Islamic principles of art and architecture while following present day norms for health and safety. The attention to detail was quite exceptional. I shall visit it again.

Jon

Inter Faith Week 2013

National Inter Faith Week 2013 ran from 17th to 24th November. Some events started before, some later. Here are three contributions that were not covered in previous issues.

National IF Week started on Monday with the Mayor of London's reception and I was delighted to see the video of the South London interfaith walks on screens around the place and the excellent display in the café area. Lots of networking. Boris was his usual self making it up as he went along! On Wednesday, members of the Council of Christians and Jews joined the Westminster Cathedral interfaith group for a talk by Phiroza Gan on being a Zoroastrian. It was excellent. She also spoke about the free exhibition at SOAS. 21 came which was a record for us – we have not seen so many since the Understanding Islam course. Last night, I went to Lambeth Town Hall for the interfaith event. We heard from the Borough police commander, leader of the council, leader of the Health and faith initiative and the Food banks organiser. Good stalls and lots of networking. Today I visited the Faiths together in Croydon display at Croydon voluntary action shop on first floor of Centrale near House of Fraser. Lovely paintings and a good if small display in the window.

John Woodhouse

Monday 19 November 2013 - An Evening of Compassion

Dacorum Interfaith Network held an 'Evening of Compassion' at Hemel Hempstead Quaker Meeting House where the Charter of Compassion was launched for Hemel. The Charter for Compassion which aims to break down barriers has been signed by over 90,500 individuals across the world and transcends religious and national differences.

Guest speakers from local Anglicans, Catholics, Druids, Jains, Jews and Quakers shared stories, thoughts, prayers and lit a candle to show compassion within their faith. Margaret Slynn attended as the Catholic representative.

The evening was a success. The Charter was well received, with new members signing it. At the heart of all different religions is compassion, this is what inspired the charter to be created. It doesn't matter what faith individuals believe in, we all need to raise awareness within ourselves of compassion and share this in the community. Karen Armstrong was the main key in the Charter coming to Great Britain from America. It is hoped that this Charter

will help spread the word of compassion amongst the local residents.

Dacorum Interfaith Network meets monthly at the Civic Centre in Hemel Hempstead, where they plan and run events for people of any faith and none. New members are welcome. For more information please see www.charterforcompassion.org and www.dacorum.gov.uk/residents and follow the Interfaith link.

Margaret Slynn

Launch of Signposts

I like going to Religious Society of Friends' Meeting House in Euston. I have been there on several occasions for a variety of events. The people there are always so welcoming, helpful and friendly. It is open to all and most faiths have held an event there. I've never been there for a Quaker event, so I looked forward to attending the launch of *Signposts* during National Interfaith Week in November 2013.

The launch was held in the library, next to the café, where I met a Rabbi, a couple of Muslims as well as Quakers and people of other faiths. The authors, Eva Tucker and Stephanie Ramamurthy, took turns in introducing the booklet, which describes the history of Quaker involvement in interfaith in North London over 30 years. Both authors spoke about their experiences and faith journeys and how they were drawn to Quakerism and interfaith involvement. Bessie White, who currently serves on the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations (QCCIR), also shared her experiences and told us about Quaker interfaith activities around the country. Their stories were fascinating. Eva's and Stephanie's spiritual journeys are wonderfully recorded in the booklet.

Indeed, it was good to hear and read about the different contacts they made on their spiritual journeys, especially when they mentioned people I knew or had heard about from others: Brother Daniel Faivre, Alfred Agius, Karen Armstrong, Harriet Crabtree, Brian Pearce, Venerable Nagase and many others. Of course, Westminster Interfaith is mentioned several times, including the annual multi-faith pilgrimages for peace. For readers of the Newsletter and regular participants of the annual pilgrimage, it is a happy walk down memory lane and more besides. I recommend *Signposts: Quakers exploring interfaith*, published by Kindlers at only £3.00. It's well worth reading.

Jon

Book Reviews

Muhammad (SAW): 1001 Universal Appreciations and Interfaith Understanding and Peace by Dr Mohammed A. Lais, First Edition Design Publishing. RRP £13.49

A few years ago, Dr Lais contacted me to discuss a proposal for some research he wanted to conduct on how people regarded the prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his family). We had just moved to the Hendon office and Dr Lais was one of our first visitors. He interviewed me and asked me to put him in touch with other Christian clergy. I said I'd see what I could do. I contacted a number of clergy and asked them if they were willing to be interviewed by this Muslim academic. I was surprised how many said yes. Dr Lais then asked me if I knew any rabbis and other faith leaders. I did and that led him along another fruitful path.

Last year, just after the election of Pope Francis, Dr Lais contacted me to thank me. His research was almost complete. There was only one thing missing: an interview with Pope Francis! I said it was unlikely but 'nothing is impossible with God'. As Cardinal Tauran was due to come to England that summer perhaps he could interview him instead. He represented the Pope on interreligious affairs. The interview did not happen but Dr Lais got his 1001 quotes anyway.

I'm delighted to recommend this book to you, which is based on the perceptions of non-Muslims on the life, character and teachings of the Prophet. Many of these perceptions have led to gross misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the Prophet over the centuries. Others have been more positive and appreciative. Dr Lais covers all angles, including a significant part of Muhammad's teachings on interfaith unity, religious tolerance and social harmony, which are not often dealt with by writers.

The book is a labour of love and devotion. As Damian Howard SJ states in the Foreword, the book is "a sign of hope in these tumultuous times". The book launch will take place in the House of Lords in Monday 8 June. Paperback is available at Amazon.

Three Windows on Heaven edited by Aly El-Samman, Gilgamesh Publishing, RRP £24.95 hardback

I had the honour and pleasure of meeting Dr Aly El-Samman at the launch of his book at Lambeth Palace in November 2013 during the celebrations of National Interfaith Week. Dr Aly told us how this book had finally come together after 20 years, when he first had the idea of finding concepts, which were common to the three Abrahamic faiths.

He spoke at length about his involvement in Christian Muslim dialogue as the interfaith advisor to the grand imam of Al-Azhar. He remembered the first agreement between Al-Azhar and the Vatican in 1998, followed by a similar agreement between Al-Azhar and the Anglican communion in 2001, and his involvement with representatives of the Jewish religion in Europe, USA and Israel. His findings are recorded in his book, appropriately titled: **Three windows on heaven**, in which he gathers statements and essays by prominent figures from the three religions. Not surprisingly, he concludes that Judaism, Christianity and Islam basically teach the same thing: that people should honour and care for one another irrespective of race, culture, colour or creed. There are pictures, which always help, of the author with various religious figures, including Pope John Paul II in 1998. It's an interesting collection of statements and sacred texts related to acceptance of others, dialogue and peace. Almost a reference book. Worth having.

Jon

Group visit to Chennai

Canon Ivor Smith-Cameron will be leading a group of a dozen or so people to visit to Chennai just after Christmas 2014, for around 12 days. The group will visit the Church of South India Diocese of Madras, including St Thomas' Mount, where the Apostle Thomas is believed to have been martyred in 79CE, as well as many other important historical and religious sites. Cost about £1200, including return air fare, visa, food, local travel for the 12 days as well as accommodation in spacious

well-ordered Laity Institute for Transformation in the heart of Chennai.

Canon Ivor Smith-Cameron has led groups on similar visits for the past 4 years. They have proved to be enriching experiences, both socially and spiritually.

For more information, contact Canon Ivor: ivorsmithcameron@yahoo.co.uk; 020 8678 8977

Religious leaders meet Pope Francis

From 17-21 March 2014, more than 250 people from all walks of life, representing 8 religions from different countries, attended an international inter-religious meeting at Castel Gandolfo just outside Rome. They had come together to honour the life and legacy of the founder of the Focolare Movement, Chiara Lubich, who passed away six years ago. Many of them had met her and even worked with her as she led her tireless efforts in promoting inter-religious unity.

Included in the Conference programme was a private audience with Pope Francis on the anniversary of his installation as Bishop of Rome. There was great excitement among the group because he had agreed to meet just 20 representatives of the different faith communities. In great unity, 20 were chosen. Because a transport strike was called in Rome on that day, they set off at 5am on the feast of St Joseph in order to get to the Pope's residence by 7am. The remaining group was given the option of attending the general audience in St Peter's Square

or going on a guided tour of Rome. Most chose to join the crowds for the general audience. Pope Francis met the group briefly as planned after breakfast with Cardinal Tauran. He spoke to the group and greeted each person individually. One young member of the group was so excited at meeting the Pope in person for the first time, he did not know what to do or say. When it was his turn to speak to Pope Francis, all he could think of saying was, "Holy Father, can I embrace you?" They embraced. He does not remember what the Pope said. He was very happy and has the photo to prove it! Everybody who met the Pope had a personal story to tell. Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh, Sikh from England said: "The Pope for me is a Holy person. He's a blessed soul. The Pope is sitting on the Seat of St. Peter so there is a long line of legacy that he is carrying. And what happens when you meet a Holy person? You're reminded of God Almighty."

Forthcoming Events

Saturday 26th April 1pm

CSCA and St Lawrence's Church present The Inner Trail of Faith series on *the Islamic Faith* at CSCA Centre, Manor House, Manor Lane, Feltham TW13 4JQ www.spiritandculture.org.uk;

Saturday 26th April 2-4pm

'No Faith in Trident' Tour with Bruce Kent plus speakers from local faith communities as well as the opportunity to ask questions ending with light refreshments. at Quaker Meeting House, 59 Wandsworth High Street, London SW18 2PT opposite Wandsworth Civic Centre.

Monday 12th May 10.00am-2.45pm

Welwyn Hatfield Inter-Faith Group (Women's Social Group) invite you to an *Interfaith Day for Women*. Keynote speaker: **Farrukh Shaikh: My life as a Muslim in Britain today**. Bring and share vegetarian lunch and an artefact from your faith to talk about. Methodist Church Hall, junction of Ludwick Way and Cole Green Lane, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 3PN For further details Contact: Erica Leith, erica@grbooks.com; Tel: 01438 716062

Embrace the Middle East's Annual Lecture, Tuesday 20th May 2014 6.30-8pm St James's Church, Piccadilly, **Syria: What hope?** Keynote speaker: **His Beatitude Gregorios III**, Patriarch of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church; Chair: **His Eminence Mor Eustathius Matta Roham**, Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan of Jazirah and Euphrates. A collection will be taken in support of Embrace the Middle East's humanitarian work with Syrian Refugees. **Booking essential** from www.embraceme.org/AL14 or info@embraceme.org;

Embrace the Middle East, 24 London Road West, Amersham HP7 0EZ; tel: 01494 897933

British Association for Study of Spirituality

Monday 19th - Wednesday 21st May 2014

Third international residential conference "Spirituality in a Challenging World" at the beautiful country estate, Ashridge House, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire. **Full cost including Gala Dinner: £575.** Registration via the BASS website: www.bassspirituality.org.uk or details from Georgina Long: georginaatbass@gmail.com

Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter

34 Chepstow Villas, W11 2QZ
Tel: 020 7727 3597 / 020 7313 8286
E: sioncde@yahoo.co.uk
www.sistersofourladyofsion.org

44th Cardinal Bea Memorial Lecture 2014

Thursday 22nd May 2014 7.00pm

Wine reception from 6.00pm

Booking Essential

Speakers:
Rabbi Alexandra Wright (*Senior Rabbi of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, St John's Wood*)
Clifford Longley (*Religious affairs correspondent and columnist*)
Chair: **Maggie Doherty** (*Senior Media Officer for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales, Press Secretary to Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor*)

(Continued on page 10)

Forthcoming Events

(Continued from page 9)

North London Interfaith Discussion Group at St Patrick's, Hardie Close, Neasden, NW10 0UH **Saturday 2 May** 11.30-1.30. Contact: Sister Elizabeth 0207 281 4371

Christian Muslim Marriage Support Group

Star Centre at St Andrews, Fulham, London. Contact Rosalind or Heather confidentially through the inter faith marriage website: www.interfaithmarriage.org.uk Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/185782491456844/>

Westminster Interfaith

14th June 9.45am-6pm 29th Annual Multi-Faith Pilgrimage for Peace in North London. Booking essential

London Dojo Battersea Park

Ven G. Nagase, c/o Park Manager's Office, Battersea Park, Albert Bridge Rd, SW11 4NJ. T: 020 7228 9620 **Saturday 21 June 3-6pm** Anniversary of Peace Pagoda with chanting from various Buddhist traditions, multi-faith prayers, various speakers and multi-cultural celebrations.

Nipponzan Myohoji Peace Pagoda,

Brickhill St, Willen Lake, Milton Keynes MK15 0BG T: 01908 663 652

Sunday 22 June 10.30am-3.30pm Anniversary of Peace Pagoda, includes Buddhist ceremony, multi-faith prayers, various speakers on anti-nuclear activities and non-violent action and multi-cultural celebrations. Lunch provided.

Westminster Cathedral Interfaith Group

Hinsley Room, Morpeth Terrace, SW1P 1Q. Every 3rd Wednesday [4-5pm] Contact John Woodhouse 0790 8888 586 by text; E: woodhousesopten@btinternet.com

16 April Holy Week meeting

21 May Imam Asim Hafiz, Islamic Religious Advisor to CDS and Service Chiefs Ministry of Defense

South London Inter Faith Group

12.30-2pm. Meetings with Lunch on last Thursday of the month at Streatham Friends Meeting House, Roupell Park Estate, Redland Way, SW2 3LU.

Details: secretary@southlondoninterfaith.org.uk

10th April and 10th May 7-8.15pm **Conversations for the soul** - one to one interfaith conversations about beliefs and practice at South London Islamic Centre, 8 Mitcham Lane, SW16 6NN Tel: 020 8677

0588 Contact John Woodhouse 0790 8888 586 by text; Email: woodhousesopten@btinternet.com

Ham Faithful Friends Contact: Diana

[dianamills@phonecoop.coop]

June 10th to 12th: Understanding Islam, three day course with Chris Hewer

Plenty of events also at the following centres:

London Interfaith Centre

125 Salusbury Rd London NW6 6RG

<http://londoninterfaith.org.uk/>

Enquiries to info@londoninterfaith.org.uk

Kensington Council of Churches

Kensington United Reformed Church
Allen Street, London W8 6BL

Three Faiths Forum

New offices, lots of activities. Contact Director, Stephen Shashoua, 3FF, Star House, 104 Grafton Road, London NW5 4BA

St Ethelburga's Centre

78 Bishopsgate, London EC2N 4AG; T:020 7496 1610
www.stethelburgas.org; E: tent@stethelburgas.org

Monday, April 28, 2014 - 18:30 As The Forgiveness Project celebrates its 10th anniversary, the charity has launched a new thought-provoking series of ten talks entitled '*Conversations on Forgiveness*' which invite the public to debate a variety of themes around forgiveness

Tues 20th May 10am: Understanding Conflict

A full-day interactive workshop as the first part of our conflict resilience training, discussing how we can understand and map conflict in faith communities.

Tues 3rd June 10am: Processing Conflict

The second instalment of our training, exploring emotions surrounding conflict and providing tools to process these challenges.

Ammerdown Centre

Ammerdown Park, Radstock, Somerset, BA3 5SW7
Tel: 01761 433709 Fax 01761 433094 For program of courses email: centre@ammerdown.org

Inter Faith Week in England, Northern Ireland and Wales will take place from 16 to 24 November 2014

Scottish Inter Faith Week runs from 23 to 30 November, including, as usual, St Andrew's Day

Calendar of Religious Festivals

- 20 April** **PASCHA / EASTER** *Christian* The most important festival of the Christian year, when Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. A vigil is kept during the preceding night and the resurrection of Christ is greeted with the lighting of candles and the affirmation 'Christ is risen'. Many Easter tradition, such as the giving of Easter eggs symbolize the gift of new life.
- 21 April-2 May** **RIDVAN** (*Baha'i*) The most important Baha'i festival. It was in these 12 days that Baha'u'llah declared himself as the Promised One prophesied by the *Bab*. The festival is named after the garden outside Baghdad in which he was staying. The first, ninth and twelfth days are especially significant and are celebrated as holy days, when no work is done. During this period Baha'is elect local, national and international governing bodies.
- 23 April** **ADAR MAH PARAB** *Zoroastrian (Shenshai - Parsi)* On the day of Adar, the 9th day, during the month of Adar, the 9th month, Zoroastrians celebrate the birthday of fire. It is customary to go to the fire temple to make offerings of sandalwood or incense and to thank the holy fire for the warmth and light it has given throughout the year. Traditionally on this day food is not cooked in the house as the fire is given a rest and the *Atash Niyayeesh* or litany to the fire is recited in honour of the house fire or the ceremonial oil lamp.
- 23 April** **ST GEORGE'S DAY** (*Christian, National*) St George is the patron saint of England.
- 27 April** **CANONIZATION OF POPE JOHN XXIII AND POPE JOHN PAUL II** *Christian / Roman Catholic.* On this day, Pope Francis will declare both Popes John XXIII and John Paul II as saints in heaven.
- 28 April** **YOM HA-SHOAH (Holocaust Day)** *Jewish* A day when Jewish people remember the six million Jews, including one and a half million children, who were victims of the Nazi Holocaust. Memorial candles are lit and special services held. The date is chosen as the closest date (in the Jewish calendar) to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.
- 30 April** **BELTAINE/MAY EVE** *Wiccan Pagan BELTAINE* *Druid* The wheel of the year continues to turn and spring gives way to summer's full bloom and the fertility of the land is at its height. Many pagans celebrate Beltaine by lighting fires and leaping over them, and/or with maypole dances, symbolizing the mystery of the Sacred Marriage of Goddess and God.
- 11-17 May** **CHRISTIAN AID WEEK** *Christian* Initiated in 1945, this week is devoted to fund raising by members of various churches, mainly through house to house collections and sales of goods of various kinds. The money given is for work with the needy throughout the world, helping people, regardless of religion or race, in over 60 countries, to improve their own lives and tackle the causes of poverty and injustice.
- 13/14 May** **VESAKHA PUJA/WESAK/BUDDHA DAY/ BODHI DAY** *Buddhist* On Wesak Theravadins celebrate the birth, enlightenment under the *Bodhi* Tree in Bodhgaya in North India, and the final passing away of Gautama Buddha. Mahayanists have separate days for each of them and on *Bodhi* Day celebrate the enlightenment of the Buddha. Houses are decorated with lanterns and garlands, and temples are ringed with little oil lamps, consisting of a simple cloth or cotton wick in a small clay vessel of oil. People may send 'Wesak cards' to their friends. Particular stress is laid on this day on the Buddha's enlightenment. Lay people come together at monasteries for this, the biggest of the Buddhist festivals.
- 18 May** **LAG B'OMER** *Jewish* The *Omer* period of 49 days, lasting from Pesach to Shavuot, is a time of sadness, relieved on this, the 33rd day, which recalls the end of a plague in Roman times. It is often celebrated by out of door activities. A large number of weddings take place, since they are not permitted during the other days of the *Omer*.
- 23 May** **ANNIVERSARY OF THE DECLARATION OF THE BAB** (*Baha'i*) The *Bab* heralded the arrival of Baha'u'llah and was co-founder of the Baha'i faith. He first declared his mission in Persia in 1844. He inaugurated the Baha'i calendar which numbers itself from the year of this declaration.
- 25 May** **ZARATOSHT NO DISO** *Zoroastrian (Shenshai; Parsi)* **25 December** *Zoroastrian (Iranian)* The death anniversary of the Prophet Zarathushtra and it is a sorrowful occasion. Tradition records that this is when he was assassinated at the age of 77. It is customary to visit the Fire Temple, participate in special remembrance prayers (to him and to the *Fravashis* (the guardian spirits of departed ancestors), and ponder upon the *Gathas* or Hymns of Zarathushtra, which embody his eternal message to humanity.
- 27 May** **THE PROPHET'S NIGHT JOURNEY AND ASCENT/LAILAT (LAYLAT) UL ISRA WALMIRAJ (27th Rajab)** *Muslim* This celebrates the journey of the Prophet Muhammad, in the tenth year of his prophethood, from Makkah to Jerusalem and through the heavens to the presence of God, all in one night. On this night the command that Muslims should pray five times each day was given to the Prophet. The rock in Jerusalem from which the Prophet ascended is now contained in the Dome of the Rock. Muslims mark this night by reading the *Qur'an* and saying additional prayers.

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Calendar of Religious Festivals:

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- 29 May** **ANNIVERSARY OF THE ASCENSION OF BAHÁ'U'LLAH** *Baha'i* Commemorates the death of Baha'u'llah at Bahji, near Acre, in 1892. His shrine there is the place towards which all Baha'is face when praying.
- 29 May** **ASCENSION DAY** (40 days after Easter) *Christian* commemorates the last earthly appearance of the Risen Christ, who ascended into heaven in the presence of many witnesses. *The Catholic Church in England celebrates this feast on the following Sunday, 1st June*
- 2 June** **DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL/DUANWUJIE/TUAN YANG CHIEH** *Chinese* Boat races between slim rowing boats shaped like dragons. People also go down to the rivers to picnic and celebrate on boats. Originally the festival commemorated the suicide by drowning of the poet and statesman Ch'u Yuan in about 279 BCE.
- 4-5 June** **SHAVUOT** *Jewish* Also known as Feast of Weeks / Pentecost, Shavuot is a two day festival which falls seven weeks after Pesach. It celebrates the revelation of the *Torah* to Moses on Mount Sinai. It also marks the time when the first harvest was taken to the Temple.
- 8 June** **PENTECOST / WHITSUN** *Christian* Often seen as the 'birthday' of the Church, since this is when the disciples of Jesus first proclaimed the Gospel after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is celebrated 50 days (7 weeks after Easter).
- 13 June** **THE NIGHT OF FORGIVENESS/LAILAT-UL-BARA'AH (14th Sha'ban)** *Muslim* **BIRTHDAY of 12th IMAM, Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Mahdi** (Shi'a) On 14th Sha'ban, 8th month of the Muslim calendar and two weeks before Ramadan commences, Muslims seek forgiveness for their sins. The night is spent in prayer.
- 15 June** **TRINITY SUNDAY** *Christian* In the West, Trinity Sunday is celebrated on the Sunday after Pentecost. Christians reflect on the mystery of God, who is seen as One but is understood in and through God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (*Eastern Orthodox Christians* celebrate the feast of **ALL SAINTS** on this day.)
- 16 June** **MARTYRDOM OF GURU ARJAN** (1606) *Sikh* The fifth Guru was executed on the orders of the Moghul Emperor, Jehangir, for refusing to pay a fine arising from a charge of treason. Guru Arjan made the first compilation of the Sikh Scriptures, called the *Adi Granth*, and supervised the completion of what is now the Golden Temple in Amritsar. A *gurburb* is held on this day including an *akhand path* - continuous reading of *Adi Granth*.
- 19 June** **CORPUS CHRISTI** *Christian* celebrates the institution of the Eucharist. It falls 60 days after Easter, on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. Many Church now celebrate it on the Sunday after Trinity Sunday. Processions of the Blessed Sacrament are common.
- 21 June** **MIDSUMMER SOLSTICE** *Wiccan Pagan* **22 June SUMMER SOLSTICE** (*Alban Heruin or Alban Hefin*) *Druid* The festival of Midsummer, sometimes called Litha. The light of the sun is at the height of its power. It is a time of plenty and celebration. **WORLD HUMANIST DAY** is a day for spreading awareness of Humanism as a philosophical life stance and as a means for effecting change in the world. It is also seen as a time for Humanists to gather socially and promote the positive values of Humanism.
- 29 June** **RATHA YATRA** *Hindu* 'Chariot Journey'. Thousands of devotees pull huge wagons (*rathas*) supporting images of Krishna, known under the name of 'Jagannath', Lord of the Universe, from which the word 'juggernaut' comes.
- 29 June - 27 July** **RAMADAN** *Muslim* During Ramadan Muslims fast from dawn to sunset. Fasting (*sawn*) is one of the 5 pillars of Islam. It is the holiest month of the year. Muslims dedicate themselves to spiritual renewal, prayer and intensive devotional reading of the *Qur'an*. The fast is traditionally broken each evening by taking dates and water.

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A Creation Legend

An ancient legend has it that when God was creating the world He was approached by four angels.

The first one asked, "How are you doing it?"

The second, "Why are you doing it?"

the third, "Can I be of help?"

The fourth, "What is it worth?"

The first was a scientist; the second, a philosopher; the third, an altruist; and the fourth, a real estate agent .

A fifth angel watched in wonder and applauded in sheer delight.

This one was the mystic.

From: 'the Prayer of the Frog' by A. de Mello S.J. By kind permission of the publishers, Gujerat Sahitya Prakash Anand, India.