



One Family

The Newsletter of the World Congress of Faiths

January 2012

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The World Congress of Faiths is an individual membership organisation. It is a member of the Inter Faith Network (UK) and works with other interfaith organizations in Britain and across the world. The members of the Executive of WCF are drawn from all major religious communities in Britain.

We encourage people of all faiths to join and share their experiences and their spiritual quest with each other. The World Congress of Faiths believes that understanding between people of different religions is important for good community relations, for moral and spiritual renewal and for world peace. A principle is respect for those of differing faith. WCF by its educational work encourages interfaith understanding and co-operation at all levels of society.

Dates for your diaries: future WCF events

Wednesday 1 February: Healing The World: Oneness & Compassion at London Central Mosque, 146 Park Road, London NW8 7RG from 12.30pm to 5.00 p.m.

An interfaith experience co-sponsored by World Congress of Faiths, the International Association for Religious Freedom, Religions for Peace, United Religions Initiative,

Speakers include: Rabbi Jackie Tabick, Imam Abduljalil Sajid, Sister Maureen Goodman, and Karin Bali

Please e-mail [Richard Boeke at r.boeke@virgin.net](mailto:Richard.Boeke@virgin.net) or tony.reese@worldfaiths.org if you are coming.

Wednesday 14 March: Tour of Guildford Cathedral followed by lunch and dialogue with Canon Andrew Bishop and chaplains of the University of Surrey, *including* discussion of proposed new Interfaith Centre.

Wednesday 2 May at the London Interfaith Centre, 125 Salusbury Road, London NW6 6RG

WCF annual general meeting at 5.00 p.m. followed by refreshments 6.45pm to 8pm:

Economic Justice - what should people of faith be doing? 6.45 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.: Workshops to explore this question in the World Religions.

Sunday 22 July: evening service at St Martin in the Fields at 6.30 p.m. to pray, at the start of the Olympic Games, for an increase in international and interfaith friendship. Members of different faiths will participate in the service; people of all faiths are welcome to attend.

Sunday 2 September, at Golders Green Unitarian Church, 31 Hoop Lane, Golders Green, London NW11 8BS at 3.00 p.m.: WCF Ninth Interfaith Service in Celebration of Animals.

Wednesday 3 October at the Global Retreat Centre, Nuneham Park, Nuneham Courtenay, OX44 9PG

A quiet day to recharge our batteries to face the coming winter, words of inspiration from the different faiths, surrounded by companionable silences and wonderful company.

Wednesday 5 December: The Annual Younghusband Meeting at Global Cooperation House, 65-69 Pound Lane, London NW9 2HH – *further details to follow*. It is always helpful if you can let us know if you are planning to come to WCF events: [e-mail tony.reese@worldfaiths.org](mailto:tony.reese@worldfaiths.org); telephone: Tel: 01935 864055, or by post to World Congress of Faiths, 125 Salusbury Road, London NW6 6RG

Younghusband Lecture, 2011

In a change from previous years, when the Younghusband Lecture has been given immediately after the WCF annual general meeting, this year it was held in December. The lecture was held at St John's Wood Liberal Synagogue and given by Karen Armstrong who spoke on compassion and the Golden Rule as being the core of religion.

After she was awarded the TED prize in 2008, Karen Armstrong use her prize money to form the Charter of Compassion that has been signed by thousands of people throughout the world and is designed to 'transcend religious, ideological and national differences'. Its aim is to build a more compassionate world through adhering to the Golden Rule and encouraging people to learn more compassion in their own traditions and apply it in the relationships with other people. She stated that compassion is not the same as pity; instead it is summarised by Jesus of Nazareth in the phrase: 'do to others what you would have them do to you' and by Rabbi Hillel when he said, 'That which is hateful to you, do not do it to another'.



After the lecture there was the familiar fellowship that attends all WCF meetings and it was good to see both familiar faces and some new one too from different religions.



The evening of the Younghusband Lecture also saw the first public appearance of two specially designed World Congress of Faith's banners.

One of them celebrates the contribution of Francis Younghusband who founded WCF in 1936. The second banner celebrates in pictures some of the many events that WCF have sponsored 1936 until 2011; yes the most recent photograph is of Marcus Braybrooke presenting Jackie Tabick with the Gold Interfaith on behalf of Sir Sigmund Sternberg at the 75th anniversary service at St Martin's in the Field. Karen Armstrong and Jackie Tabick are pictured standing in front of one of them.

Faith Community responses to riots in 2011

[The Inter Faith Network for the UK \[www.interfaith.org.uk\]](http://www.interfaith.org.uk) has compiled a survey of Faith community responses to the recent riots. The response of faith community members again exemplified the contribution that members of all religions make towards positive relations in their local communities.

WCF's 75th Anniversary Service

St Martin in the Fields in Trafalgar Square was full on July 24th for a special evening service which marked the 75th anniversary of the founding of the World Congress of Faiths. The venue was particularly appropriate as the memorial service for Sir Francis Younghusband - the founder of WCF – which was held there in 1942, had included tributes from people of different faiths, in what *The Church Times* described as a 'rather improper performance.'



This year's service on July 24th was a reminder that today - thanks to the translations made during the last century and now the World Wide Web – we can learn from all the scriptures, which are treasured by different faith communities. This was especially fitting in a year when many English-speaking Christians are giving thanks for the King James or the Authorised Bible, which was published four hundred years ago. Increasingly faith communities see their holy scriptures not as a possession to be guarded from others, but as a precious gift to be held in trust and to be shared with all people.

At the beginning of the service, members of the congregation greeted each other with words of peace. At the service participants rededicated themselves to working together for peace, to caring for those who are hungry and afflicted and to treasuring the earth.

The service was led by Revd Richard Carter of St Martin in the Fields. There were readings by Zenhar Marolia (Zoroastrian); Dr Vinod Kapashi (Jain), Shaunaka Rishi Das (Hindu); Venerable Seelawimala (Buddhist); Imam Abduljalil Sajid (Muslim), Ajit and Charanjit Singh (Sikh); Martha Besser (Baha'i); Mary Braybrooke, Helen and Anna Hobin (Christian). The address was given by Rabbi Jackie Tabick (Jewish). Prayers were said by Jean Potter (Christian) and a meditation was led by Sister Maureen Goodman (Brahma Kumaris). The readings were interspersed by hymns and anthems, beautifully sung by the Choral Scholars of St Martin in the Fields, directed by Andrew Earis.

The service was preceded by a reception for members and friends kindly arranged by the International Committee of the Church. After the service the Gold Interfaith medallion was presented to Rabbi Jackie Tabick by Rev Dr Marcus Braybrooke on behalf of Sir Sigmund Sternberg.



Revd Dr Marcus Braybrooke and Rabbi Jackie Tabick

Into the Heart: London Central Mosque 7 Dec 2011 – text of talk by Revd Dr Marcus Braybrooke

“‘A Declaration of Oneness for the Human Family’ - what was it asked a friend who telephoned from America.’ I had to go back to an old copy of *World Faiths Insight* for the answer. It was a declaration drafted in 1984 by Robert Muller, then an Under Secretary at the United Nations and endorsed by many spiritual leaders at a Temple of Understanding at a Spiritual Summit in the Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York. In view of tonight’s meeting, point nine stood out: ‘An affirmation of the Law of Love and Compassion as the Transcending Force which alone can break the nemesis of war and establish a Planet of Peace.’¹

At an earlier Spiritual Summit, Thomas Merton insisted that the interfaith task was not to ‘discover a new unity. We discover an older unity. My dear brothers, we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. What we have to recover is our original unity.’ This is true for the human family as a whole – sadly people of faith have not always witnessed to this. On his flight across the Pacific Thomas Merton wrote, ‘May I not come back ... without finding the great compassion, *mahakaruna*.’²

I wanted to be a little clearer about the meaning of *Mahakaruna*. A web search brought me immediately to these words: ‘Mahakaruna means great compassion. I live in two worlds: that of supposedly progressive politics for the sake of justice, peace, sustainability and democracy; and that of spiritual practice. This is a blog from the somewhat less charted territory between them. Having spent much time organizing with the global justice movement, I no longer know how to proceed – how to create social action that is not based on anger and blame. Please help.’³

Not surprisingly answers pointed the enquirer to Plum Village and the teaching of Thich Nhat Hahn. Many of you will know his poem

*I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones
My legs thin as bamboo sticks,
And I am the arms merchants, selling deadly
Weapons to Uganda*

*I am the 12-year-old girl, refugees
On a small boat,
Who throws herself into the ocean after
Being raped by a sea pirate
And I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable
Of seeing and loving...*

*Please call me by my true names
So I can wake up
And so the door of my heart can be left open,
The door of compassion.*⁴

As I look into my own my anger and disgust at those who sell and use young girls as sex slaves, there is compassion for the victims but little for the perpetrators.

Howard Thurman, an American mystic and theologian, had the honesty to face this dilemma and recognize that one may use the tools of non-violence while one’s mood continues to be violent, a mood that inspires hate, that wills the nonexistence of the other.’ True non-violence, he says, ‘is to open the door of the heart so that what another is feeling and experiencing can find its way within...

A person faced with nonviolence is forced to deal with himself; every way of escape is ultimately cut off.’⁵ The same Thurman insists is true of those who claim to practice non-violence. We have to face the naked fear of being completely vulnerable.

The journey into the world is at the same time a journey into the heart. We can find help from the wisdom of all the great faiths as we open ourselves to the Spirit of Compassion, which is 'The Transcending Force that can purge out heart and our world of violence'.

¹ See *World Faiths Insight*, New Series 10 and 11, Winter and Summer 1985 editions.

² Jim Forset, *Living with Wisdom: A Life of Thomas Merton*, Orbis, (1991), 2008 edition, pp.222-225

³ mahakaruna.blogspot.com

⁴ Thich Nhat Hahn, *Being Peace*, Parallax Press, Berkeley 1987, pp. 63-64. see also my *A Heart for the World*, O Books, 2005, p.53

⁵ Howard Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit*, Friends United Press, Richmond IN47374, 1963, pp.113-118

Inter Faith Harmony Week

The World Congress of Faiths in supporting Inter Faith Harmony week. On 1st February it is jointly sponsoring 'Healing the World: Oneness & Compassion' at London Central Mosque, Regents Park. [See page one for further details]. Enclosed with this edition of One Family is a letter from Rabbi Jackie Tabick, chair of WCF, encouraging you to become involved in the Week – and sending details of your various events.

2011 Mitzvah Day:



A group of Muslim and Jewish women met together for tea and discussion as part of Mitzvah Day, Interfaith Week and the world wide Muslim Jewish twinning programme. Participants were asked to bring a text from their own tradition of women that had inspired them. The range was enormous, from Deborah, the prophetess to Aisha, one of the wives of the Prophet, peace be upon him.

The Hindu Christian Forum:

The Hindu Christian Forum was formed by a group of Hindus and Christians who have been meeting together since 2001. Its co-chairs are The Venerable Richard Atkinson, Archdeacon of Leicester and Ramesh Pattni, Inter Faith Chair of the Hindu Forum of Britain. There are six Christian and six Hindu members on the board, who represent the major denominations and communities organisations of both faiths.

In 2009 the Hindu Christian Forum received a grant to enable it to commission an academic research project in the form of a 'listening exercise' attending to the voices of Hindus and Christians in Preston, Leicester and London. The lead researcher, Dr Jessica Frazier of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, was supported by both members of the Hindu Christian Forum and an academic advisory board of scholars. It is anticipated that the Report, entitled 'Barriers and Bridges' will positively contribute to Christian-Hindu dialogue, both in local communities and nationally, and encourage further research. The Report can be downloaded free of charge from www.ochs.org.uk.

There was a formal launch of the Hindu Christian Forum at Lambeth Palace during Inter Faith Week. The principle speakers were the Archbishop of Canterbury and Sri Shruti Dharma Das Ji, together with addresses by Andrew Stunell MP, Baroness Kathleen Richardson and Lord Popat.