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September 2019

PLACES OF WORSHIP WELCOME
WCF MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

JENNY KARTUPELIS REPORTS AS WCF GOES 'ON THE ROAD' OVER THE SUMMER

Prompted by requests from friends and members (and our natural spirit of enquiry!) the World Congress of Faiths planned several visits to places of worship – and received a very good response to the offer.

The place of tea in life
It was ‘full house’ when the London Fo Guang Shan Temple hosted us for a very memorable tea ceremony on 30 July. Established in 1992 and housed in a Grade II* listed building in London, the Temple is an active centre of Buddhist worship and teaching in the Mahayana tradition. (Continued...)

What is the WCF?
We are a community of individuals from different religious and ethical traditions, committed to learning from one another in a spirit of fellowship and trust. We work to increase spiritual understanding through co-operation and dialogue for the needs of society as a whole.
Summer visits: Continued.

The cultivation, brewing and drinking of tea is closely entwined with the Buddhist traditions of peaceful contemplation and mindfulness. Over many hundreds of years, Buddhist monasteries have planted the crop, made excellent tea, and presented the fruits of their labour to devotees and visitors. The place where tea is served becomes a place of peace and harmony.

The ceremony attended by WCF guests included a commentary about the stages and meaning of brewing, serving and tasting the tea, as well as music and quiet time. We were seated at tables of five or six people, each looked after by a ‘tea master’, and at the conclusion of the event, people were asked to consider what it had meant to them. Responses focussed on feelings of tranquillity and healing that the ceremony had engendered.

One guest, Rabbi Jeff Berger of Mitzvah Day summarised the visit: "It was a remarkably relaxing, tranquil experience that one will remember for a very long time. The guided meditative reflection and Chinese music contributed to a uniquely transcendent state of mind and a total sense of well-being'.

During the ceremony it was possible to concentrate on the tea master’s concise technique and graceful motions. But the delicate porcelain tea set, deep natural tea aroma and warm liquid, awakened the palate and was hugely energizing. The hour flew by so quickly."
Summer visits: Continued.

An enlightening morning in Cambridge

A group of 13 WCF guests spent a fascinating (and sunny) day in Cambridge on 21 August. Our first visit was to the Cambridge Central Mosque, opened only a few months ago, and Europe’s first ‘eco-mosque’. This is not only a stunning building in its own right, but also incorporates Islamic tradition and belief into a unique place of prayer and contemplation that is open to all, including its local – and very diverse – community.

Our tour started in the gardens fronting the cosmopolitan and busy Mill Road, where this precept immediately became clear: the gardens spill out beyond the light-touch boundaries right up to the bus stop outside, while the tranquil fountain is easily visible to passers-by, welcoming them in.

Imam Ali Tos explained the architectural and symbolic significance of the striking yet harmonious features as we entered the first hall. External and internal walls use the warmth of the Gault stonework associated with Cambridge to root the mosque in its home city, and the glass entrance doors allow daylight to flood in even as they close off the noise of the everyday and create a place of peace.

The interior combines Islamic art – in particular, variations on the theme of octagonal geometry that suggests the cycle of inhalation and exhalation or the ‘Breath of the Divine’ – with a timber structure of columns, or ‘trees’, that reach up to support the roof in interlaced lattices. This structure is deliberately evocative both of the Alhambra and of English gothic fan vaulting, famously used at the iconic King’s College Chapel. Light continues to be a leading theme, with the prayer hall lit from above by large skylights in the roof, reminiscent of Istanbul’s Blue Mosque.
These ‘trees’ of spruce are a visual reminder that everything has been designed to be environmentally friendly, with an emphasis on renewable energy, green transport and sustainability based on the Islamic rejection of waste.

Following the tour of this remarkable building, the WCF group greatly enjoyed a presentation from the mosque’s Chair, under whose guidance the project took shape and has developed over 10 years from concept to reality.

Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad spoke about the nature and role of British Islam, opening by explaining that the mosque, with its synthesis of Islamic and English religious architectural traditions, reflects the unique and beneficent place of Islam in British civilization. It draws on ancient Islamic cultural forms and interprets them into its locality through architecture carefully planned to reach out to the wider community.

In and through itself, this pioneering mosque is a visual corrective to extremist and populist narratives about Islam and has the potential to shape an inclusive and welcoming vision for a divided Britain.

WCF trustee Warwick Hawkins summarised his impression of the visit: “The new Cambridge Mosque is a wonderful example of how a faith community can reach out within its own tradition, to its neighbours of all faiths, and to the concerns of the planet through good use of architecture and a bold vision for the future.”

**Nourishment for body and soul with the Brahma Kumaris**

Later in the day, the WCF group was hosted by the Cambridge Brahma Kumaris at their centre by the River Cam. Our visit happily coincided with the Festival of Raksha Bandhan, which falls at the August full moon, and our hosts generously involved us in this important celebration.

Raksha Bandhan literally means ‘the bond of protection’, and is symbolized by the Rakkhi, a string tied around the right wrist. This has its origin in ancient times, when a virgin woman (often his sister) would give this to a warrior going into battle to protect him from harm.
The festival is now a special time set aside for students of the Brahma Kumaris tradition to re-affirm their commitment to a lifestyle of purity, vegetarian diet and abstinence from negative habits, and to re-commit to a practice of intense meditation and study of spiritual knowledge. A significant aim is to move from the limitations of personal weaknesses towards freedom and enlightenment.

Our WCF party all received a Rakkhi, which was tied to our wrists with due ceremony, and an opportunity for quiet contemplation. We were then entertained with delicious teatime treats including homemade bread and date cakes.

Outside the window, we could watch the boats going past on the Cam, and were told that occasionally one of the local cows wanders too deep into the river and has to be hauled out by rope. Fortunately no such incident marred our tranquillity! As one of our group said: “It was a wonderfully calm way to finish the day.”
Report on Foreign and Commonwealth Office Support for Persecuted Faiths - and response from Jeremy Hunt

Richard Boeke of the WCF was part of the commission who shared his verbal evidence with the review team in relation to this report. In addition he had a very constructive talk with the UK Prime Minister Special Envoy about the implementation of the recommendations of the report by the UK Government.

The result was a report on Foreign and Commonwealth Office Support for Persecuted Christians and other faiths. Complied by Bishop of Truro, it was presented to the Foreign Secretary.

In response to the interim report Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said:

'I asked the Bishop of Truro to deliver an independent, honest, unflinching and hard-hitting report. What he has delivered to me today makes for a truly sobering read. I thank him and his team for their hard work.

The interim report comes just after the appalling attacks at Easter on churches across Sri Lanka, the devastating attack on two mosques in Christchurch, and most recently the San Diego synagogue shooting.

There is nothing more medieval than to hate someone on the basis of their faith. That it is on the rise should shock us all.

I look forward to seeing the Bishop's final report in the summer, and identifying further specific steps the FCO can take to do more to address the fate of persecuted Christians around the world'.

You can read the report here: https://christianpersecutionreview.org.uk/interim-report/
“Every global challenge in this 21st century demands that we resist hatred and exclusion,” King Abdullah II of Jordan said in his opening address to last week’s International Conference on Cohesive Societies (ICCS), held last week in Singapore (pictured right).

King Abdullah II says interfaith is top priority

“Economic growth, peacemaking, protecting the environment, global security, inclusive opportunity—all these critical goals require that people of faith cooperate, and combine our strengths to our common benefit. The vast majority of people on earth are members of a spiritual community. Each has its own traditions and convictions. But our world religions also have something profound in common—the commandment to show compassion and respect for others.”

The King denounced those “who preach a hate-filled message about Islam.” Hate speech and violence are a threat to all humanity, he said, and this is why interfaith co-operation should be a top priority.

The President of Singapore - the world’s most diverse society - stressed the importance that the government attached to social cohesion. The thousand participants from across the world saw many good examples of this.

Karen Armstrong, a historian of World Religions, Lord Alderdice, Marcus Braybrooke, President of the World Congress of Faiths and some members of the Faith and Belief Forum, who took part in the programmes for young people, were among those from Britain who participated.

See further at: www.rsis.edu.sg
Interfaith news nationwide

Policy paper: strengthening our communities and nation

The Government recently published ‘By deeds and their results: how we will strengthen our communities and nation’. The document sets out the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government’s vision for stronger communities, why communities matter, what strong communities look like, and what government and partners can do to support their creation. It sets out the four pillars which will shape the Ministry’s work across Government, focused on supporting: trust, connectedness and local pride; active citizenship and local control; shared community spaces; and shared prosperity, with no community left behind. The full report can be downloaded at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/by-deeds-and-their-results-strengthening-our-communities-and-nation

Programme launched for Interfaith Week 2019 10-17 November

Inter Faith Week is a major project delivered under the umbrella of the Inter Faith Network for the UK. The 2019 programme was launched at IFN’s National Meeting (see over). The Week offers opportunities for promoting inter faith understanding and cooperation, and increasing religious literacy.

To keep up with news and promotions about the week please follow the IFN on social media:


To inspire you, have a look at ‘Inter Faith Week: Stories from 2018, inspiration for 2019’ a booklet from the IFN packed with images and stories from last year’s Week and ideas for this year. To download a copy: https://www.interfaithweek.org/resources/inter-faith-week-stories-from-2018-inspiration-for-2019 If you would like a hard copy, please contact the IFN office. Inter Faith Week posters and flyers are also available.

Free registration packs are available to those who submit details of their Inter Faith Week activities to the website at www.interfaithweek.org/submit while stocks last.
The IFN's 2019 National Meeting took place at the Coin Street Neighbourhood Centre in London on 4 July. Its theme was ‘The Changing Face of Local Inter Faith Dialogue and Cooperation’. The meeting focused on some of the possibilities and challenges of working locally for inter faith understanding and cooperation.

The day began with a welcome and opening remarks from Co-Chairs Jatinder Singh Birdi and Rt Revd Richard Atkinson. This was followed by a short overview of grassroots inter faith engagement in the UK today by IFN Executive Director, Dr Harriet Crabtree. Rabbi Warren Elf and the Revd Charles Kwaku-Odoi, Director and Co-Chair of Faith Network for Manchester (FN4M), then reflected on the impact for local inter faith organisations of seeking to respond to recurrent atrocities and hate crime issues, as well as some other challenges and opportunities of the present times. Geetha Maheshwaran from London Boroughs Faiths Network (LBFN) and Dr Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland and IFN Trustee, offered perspectives on the variety of initiatives and the importance of the involvement of faith groups.

In the afternoon, the Revd David Herbert, Chair of Newcastle Council of Faiths, reflected on how inter faith engagement has evolved across the years, as well as the importance of continuing to develop relationships of trust and mutuality; and the Revd Liz Carnelley, National Project Director of The Church Urban Fund’s Near Neighbours Programme, reflected on how small grants and help such as those offered by the programme can yield benefits in the long term.

The World Congress of Faiths was represented at the meeting by Swadeka Ahsun and Jenny Kartupelis.
Inter Faith Network meeting continued...

During the day discussion groups were held on:

‘Tackling social problems - working together and with statutory agencies’, with a presentation from Penny Smith-Orr of Faiths Together in Croydon

‘Creative Collaboration – using arts and culture to stimulate inter faith understanding and build relationships’ with a 10 minute film about ‘Angels in our City’ and a presentation from Charlotte Gravestock, Secretary of Brighton and Hove Interfaith Contact Group and Sarah West, filmmaker

‘Inter faith engagement as part of the community cohesion agenda’ with a presentation from Rauf Bashir, Project Director, Shabaz Ahmed and Katie Nolan, Community Workers at Building Bridges in Pendle

‘Local inter faith engagement with environmental issues’ with presentations from John Marder, Interfaith Officer of the Network of Buddhist Organisations and member of Crawley Interfaith Network and Kauser Akhtar, Chair of the South East England Faiths Forum

‘Faith Communities and local inter faith engagement’ with a presentation from Rajnish Kashyap, General Secretary of the Hindu Council UK and member of Council of Dharmic Faiths and Faiths Forum for London

‘Amplifying impact- maximising your local connections and highlighting your work’ with a presentation from Sheikh Irfan Soni and the Revd Simon Cash of North Kirklees Inter Faith Council

‘Bilateral and multi faith inter faith engagement at local level’ with a presentation from the Revd Patrick Moriarty, Trustee and Hon Christian Secretary of the Council of Christians and Jews.

A full report will be produced in due course. Reports on National Meetings from previous years can be found at https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/publications
Book launch: Interfaith Worship and Prayer
6pm on Tuesday 15th October
St Mary Abbots Parish Church, Kensington, London

This ground-breaking book contains a remarkable series of contributions from representatives of twelve different religions: Hinduism, African Traditional Religion, Judaism, Jainism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Shintoism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Unitarianism and Baha’i.

Interfaith Worship and prayer are not easy, but this book demonstrates that in a world of many cultures and faiths, there is an urgent need for religions to come together in love, especially when there is a crisis but also at many other times as well. Full of insights and examples of actual practice, the book demonstrates how religions can be a powerful means of unity and compassion. Believers can be sincere and committed to their own faith, while recognising the need to stand firmly together with members of other religious traditions.

This book will be launched in association with the World Congress of Faiths. You are welcome to attend but it is essential to book. (St Mary Abbots Parish Church is near to High Street Kensington Underground Station)

Please book your place by emailing cohnsherbok@gmail.com
WCF Conference - 10th September - Coventry
Book by 6th September

Meetings of Minds: Conflict, Reconciliation and Interfaith Relations

Keynote speaker: Dr Kristin Aune
Professor of Sociology of Religion, Coventry University

Topics to include:
- Education for reconciliation and interfaith encounter: mutual benefits
- Preparing young people for faith diversity
- Polarised societies and interfaith relations
- What faith communities can learn from studies in reconciliation: some lived examples

St Michael's House, Coventry CV1 5EX
wcf-meetingsofminds-conference.eventbrite.co.uk

Date for your diary:
WCF Younghasband Lecture
7th November 2019
6:30-8:30pm, London. Full details TBA
The Alister Hardy Trust 50th Anniversary Celebration
of the establishment of the Religious Experience Research Unit
by
Sir Alister Hardy FRS (1896-1985)

Dr Rupert Sheldrake
and
Hardy Family Members
and Scholars of Religious and Spiritual Experience

Saturday 19th October 2019
10.30am – 4.30pm

Oxford Quaker Meeting House, 43 St Giles, Oxford, OX1 3LW
Tel: 01865 557373  Email: office@oxfordquakers.org

Programme and further information on next page...
The Alister Hardy Trust 50th Anniversary Celebration of the establishment of the Religious Experience Research Unit by Sir Alister Hardy

Programme

10.30 am  Registration
11.00 am  Welcome
11.15 am  2019 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture
            Dr Rupert Sheldrake
            Ways to Go Beyond and Why They Work: Science and Spiritual Practices
1.00 pm    Lunch bring your own lunch, buy sandwiches nearby or enjoy local venues (tea/coffee provided)
2.00 pm    Dr Mark Fox
            Researching in the RERC Archive
2.45 pm    Memories of Sir Alister Hardy
            From family, friends and those inspired by his work
4.00 pm    Celebratory Reception
4.30 pm    Close

Cost: £25; AHT members £20; students £5

Further information: Marianne Rankin
email: marianne.rankin@studyspiritualexperiences.org
Tel: 07714 032643
**Do you have an event you would like us to advertise to our members and friends?**

Our next issue will come out in early December so please send us contributions by mid-November. Get in touch with Jane Thompson 01223 781781 or email via: jenny@worldfaiths.org

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**EVENTS**

**Sunday 8th September 11:45am: Board of Deputies of British Jews interfaith event**
Join the Board of Deputies of British Jews for a half-day event, addressing some of the most topical questions in interfaith relations: How can people of faith challenge racism together? How should we talk to each other about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? How can we act together for social justice? Location will be North West London, address will be sent to registered delegates before the event. Tickets are £5 including a kosher lunch. Numbers are limited and tickets must be booked in advance

More information click here

**Friday 20th September 9am-4:30pm, Clare Hall, Cambridge** "No Place Like Home" an all-day workshop giving new perspectives on displacement and the modern refugee regime

More information click here

**5th October and 19th October: Exploring our belief, values and worldviews in the workplace**
Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter 34 Chepstow Villas, London, W11 2QZ
5 October 2019: 10.00-15.45
19 October 2019: 10.00-15.45
In an increasingly busy and diverse world, it is more important than ever to connect with our deepest beliefs, values and worldviews, and to work for companies that do the same. The aim of the event is for participants to encounter some of the common issues and decisions that an engagement with faith and ethics in the workplace brings through reflecting on two practical case studies and sharing experiences with fellow participants. Tickets £30. More information click here

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**Tuesday 10th September 9:30am-5pm: Meetings of Minds: Conflict, Reconciliation and Interfaith Relations**
St Michael’s House, Coventry, CV1 5EX. The World Congress of Faiths 2019 Conference topics will include: education for reconciliation and interfaith encounter: mutual benefits; preparing young people for faith diversity; polarised societies and interfaith relations; and what faith communities can learn from studies in reconciliation: some lived examples.

More information click here

**8th October 7pm-9pm, Science and the Arts: going beyond two cultures, 77 Great Peter Street, London, SW1P 2EZ**
Sixty years ago, the novelist and scientist CP Snow delivered a lecture in which he famously claimed that “the intellectual life of the whole of western society” was divided into two cultures – the sciences and the humanities – and that the division harmed us all. These issues will be discussed by Tom McLeish, Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of York, and Alison Milbank, Professor of Theology and Literature at the University of Nottingham

More information click here

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**Saturday 14th September, Ammerdown Retreat, The Ammerdown Centre, Ammerdown Park, Radstock, Somerset BA3 5SW.**
Quiet Day: the 'I am' sayings of Jesus. Purpose - I am the True Vine (John 15:1-8) Led by Jan and Andy Ladhams 9:30am for 10am until 4pm. Retreat includes coffee, lunch and afternoon tea. £50.00pp.
To book 01761 433709 or email centre@ammerdown.org

More information click here
Membership application and subscription to Interreligious Insight

Name:

Address:

Telephone: Email:

Faith (optional):

Please tick as appropriate:

- I wish to join the World Congress of Faiths and subscribe to the Journal Interreligious Insight (postal version) and enclose payment for £45.

- I wish to join the World Congress of Faiths with online access to the Journal Interreligious Insight and enclose payment for £25 (or £10 if a student in full time education).

- I only wish to subscribe to the Journal Interreligious Insight (postal version) and enclose payment of £40.

Please complete the standing order mandate on the previous page and return your form to: World Congress of Faiths, 21 Maple Street, London W1T 4BE

For further information about membership or our journal please contact: Tony Reese, Administrator T: 01935 864055 E: tony.reese@worldfaiths.org
Standing Order Mandate

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