

Spring 2017



# BRENT FAITHS NEWSLETTER

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## Our Aims and Vision

Our newsletter aims to inform local people about what is happening in Brent amongst Brent's faith communities and particularly how they are cooperating together to build links and to help the local community

## Its Springtime and there are lots of Religious Festivals

We have entered the season of Spring. It is a time of celebration for many of Brent's Faith Communities. The Jewish festival of Pesach (Passover) began on April 11<sup>th</sup>. Christians celebrated Easter Sunday on April 16<sup>th</sup>. On 5<sup>th</sup> April Hindus celebrate the birthday of Rama. Sikhs New Year was on the 14<sup>th</sup> April and for the Bahai, the period of Ridvan began on 20th April

## Articles Wanted

**Have you a good story to tell about your faith community and how it is contributing to bettering community life in Brent? Are you working with other faith communities. WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU**

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## Memory Café

### Reverend Steve Morris

I was born in Southall, west London and grew up in Northolt. Most of my friends at school were Ugandan Asians. I really liked them and respected their families and their values. I saw how hard they worked and how they valued family-ties. I also saw at first hand the racism they suffered from a small section of the people they came into contact with. It was something I always wanted to do something about – unfinished business.

So when I became vicar of a mainly Hindu parish here in north Wembley I was really delighted. In fact, like most of Brent we are a rich tapestry – with Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Jewish and a rainbow of others.

When I first came to St Cuthbert's I had a couple of burning questions. First, how do we connect with the people who live here? As part of that, how can we be a blessing? Second, where is this community hurting and can we be part of the solution?

It became obvious quite quickly that the hurt was a sense of loneliness and isolation. And related to this hurt was an epidemic of Alzheimer's.

Our parish is essentially the Sudbury Court Estate. There are many older folks living alone in their family homes. Other family members have moved out and on. Many are widowed. The area also suffers from a lack of community feel. There is no pub or gathering place, few shops and it is isolated by a major road and roundabout.

It is from this diagnosis that memory café was born. We started small and just expected a few people to turn up. Our aim was to bless people with hospitality and welcome and to create a space where people could come and be loved and feel safe. We had less than ten on our first day and now get a church-full.

We have largely stuck with the original shape of the café. Tea and coffee and cakes and biscuits are a must. As are memory games and a great welcome. We open every week of the year on a Thursday 11-1pm.

The results have been astounding. We get people from all parts of our community – Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and Jewish people. We get people from across the generations and from at least a dozen countries.

The local Indian restaurant drops in snacks. We have featured on Radio London. The mayor of Brent has visited and mucked in more than once.

We have found that the memory café format attracts men and people from all communities because it is a session with a purpose. And we have consistently developed what we offer.

These days we offer a seated-exercise session with a trainer. We have an artist-in-residence who is putting together an exhibition of portraits and memories. The local volunteer-library provides books. We have started a community choir – a glorious cacophony of noise.

Memory café is an unexpected burst of cheerfulness and the whole community feel part of it. They come as guests and soon become volunteers.

I have wondered why this has been such a success. We are a church and make no bones about that. I always start each session with a prayer. But what we mainly are is home-from-home. We treat each other with respect and strong friendships have developed.

Memory café is a simple idea and is a ground-breaker. Anyone can set one up.

When I was at school and saw my Asian friends being bullied and taunted I could not do anything about it. The perpetrators were much stronger than me. I burned with rage and felt that I was powerless.

But as parish priest I am not powerless now. Memory café is a bold statement that we can do more than just live side-by-side. We can travel together and help each other and support each other. Memory café attracts those with Alzheimer's and many others who come for the companionship and joy.

One man said to me that before memory café started that he laid in bed because he would not see another human being for weeks on end. "I've got something to live for now," he told me.

I believe in community and I am so happy that our church is forming a new one. All welcome. No strings attached

# SUFRA

At an interfaith and intergenerational social action activity held on Sunday 26th March for Sadaqa-Mitzvah Day, members of both the Wembley Central Masjid and Mosaic Synagogue cooked a vegetable soup for the Sufra charity located on the St Raphael's Estate in Stonebridge Park. Sufra is a greatly respected food bank plus training and advice centre that has gained the active support of different faith groups. This cooking activity was also an opportunity for the volunteers to get to know each other better and much fun was had by all.



# ECO PEACE MIDDLE EAST

On Sunday 2nd April, at Wembley Central Mosque, friends from a range of religious faiths gathered to hear about the strategy and work of Eco Peace Middle East (formerly Friends of the Earth) in bringing clean water to Gaza. The meeting was addressed by Munqeth Mehyar (Jordan Director) and Gidon Bromberg (Israel Director), who spoke of the successes so far, the challenges of the work, and the desire of the organisation to appeal to the self interest of all sides in bringing improvements in water supply and sanitation. They emphasised the importance of citizens in the UK helping both with financial support and encouraging MPs to get involved.



The meeting also heard from representatives of the Christian, Jewish and Islamic religions talking about the call for justice and freedom.

Wembley Central Mosque provided warm hospitality and lovely food as usual!



# Diary of Events:

## Upcoming Religious Festivals

In **Islam**, **Ramadan** this year begins on 27th May and ends on 25th June with the festival of **Eid-al-Fitr**

**Christians** celebrate **Ascension Day** on 25th May and **Pentecost** on Sunday 4th June

**Jews** celebrate **Shavuot**, on 31st May and 1st June

**Hindus** celebrate **Rath Yatra** (the Chariot Festival) in honour of Lord Vishnu on June 25th

### **You are Invited:**

If You have an Event you would like to be included in the the Summer newsletter (July), please send details plus a short description to

[laurence.hillel@londoninterfaith.org.uk](mailto:laurence.hillel@londoninterfaith.org.uk)