

Bristol Multi-Faith Forum

News Magazine

December 2015

Candle-lit Vigil for Peace



It was a windy night in November when about 200 people from across the city gathered on College Green for a candle-lit peace vigil in the wake of the Paris attacks. It was organised hastily and spontaneously by local agencies and individuals including Bristol Muslim Cultural Society (BMCS); Council of Bristol Mosques; Building the Bridge; Somali Community Organisations; Stand Against Racism & Inequality (SARI); Bristol Multi-Faith Forum and others.

It was an opportunity to pay our respects to all those who lost their lives or have been devastated by acts of terrorism in Paris and also in Beirut, Turkey, Egypt, Syria and elsewhere. Also to stand united as peaceful multi-cultural, multi-faith and richly diverse communities in Bristol - our city, where so many people and agencies work tirelessly to keep our communities safe and together. Firstly we were outside, listening to speeches and prayers from a whole range of people. Then, the Cathedral opened its doors and invited everyone inside to place their candles – and it was a time for quiet reflection and shared prayer.

Speakers included, amongst others: Cllr Afzal Shah; Arif Khan, the Chair of the Council of Mosques; Rev Tracey Lewis, Chair of Bristol Multi-Faith Forum; Rev James Wilson; Zaheer Shabir, Chair of Building the Bridge; Peter Brill from Salaam Shalom; Kamlesh Vyas from the Hindu Temple; George Ferguson, the Mayor of Bristol; Alex Raikes, Director of SARI.

We were asked by several people for a copy of the speech given by our Chair Revd Tracey Lewis, so here it is...

Bristol Multi-Faith Forum exists to bring people of the different faith communities in this diverse city together, to grow in friendship with one another and speak together within the life of the city. It is my great honour to be speaking on behalf of Bristol Multi-Faith Forum this evening as we, citizens of this City of Bristol, stand together in solidarity with one another and with all those who, in the aftermath of terrible acts of terrorism in this past week, long for peace in the world.

In August this year, after a harrowing few hours in the 9/11 museum in New York, I walked slowly around the memorial at ground zero. The names of all those who died that day (September 11th 2001) are simply written around the edge of a great, deep hole. The dark empty chasm that that act of violence has left in the life of the world. When it happened we all said ... 'the world will be changed by this.' ... and it has been. The question of 'How' the world would be changed was soon overwhelmed by the launch of the 'war on terror' that we have engaged in since and heard renewed calls for this weekend as people have been left reeling after another week of dreadful attacks on innocent people.

But, whatever else we dare say today when again we stand together to mourn the deaths of the innocent in Beirut and France, with memories of so many others in our recent past, one thing we can painfully see is that our 'war on terror' is not working. We have launched counter attacks, we have engaged in wars, we have dropped bombs and committed and lost the lives of troops ... and it is not working. Responding to violence with violence however righteous it may feel in our grief and outrage responding to violence with violence ... only breeds more violence ... and we are all caught in its trap.

There is something in this world, in this time, among people, communities, nations and as a global society ... there is something that we are getting very wrong. If we are here this evening to stand together for peace then we are here to challenge ourselves and our leaders and our world ... as much as to challenge those who commit acts of terrorism and take the lives of the innocent. It is a wise word that says "Be the change you want to see."

The challenge of peace is : - To recognize and give up those natural instincts towards violence and retaliation. The ways in which we jump in with words and actions to damn and extinguish those who commit such acts. And instead be committed, utterly committed, to finding another way with one another to challenge the violent and resolve conflict. Peace is a huge challenge.

The challenge of peace is : - To value the lives of each and every human being ... to say again and again in everything we do and with everyone we meet That life, all life and all lives ... are sacred. If we are to bring about peace we must start with challenging discrimination, exclusion, injustice ... the places where violence finds its roots and its energy. The challenge of peace is to dare to meet the person who challenges you ... with humanity, humility and a commitment to value and respect them. To be different ... but human together. Peace is a huge challenge.

The challenge of peace is : - To live today, in the place where you are, with the people you meet in the way you long for the whole world to be.

*In the centre of Bristol there is a statue to Edmund Burke, who said, "All it takes for evil to prevail is for good people to do nothing." Tonight we are here, good people, to do something! To stand together and commit our selves, with our whole being, words and actions, to making peace possible for the world we share with all people. **Revd Tracey Lewis Chair of BMFF***

Health Awareness Day 2015

Our fourth Health Awareness Day was held at the Malcolm X Centre in St Pauls, on Sunday 11th October. It was a partnership event, with Bristol Multi-Faith Forum, Bristol City Council Inner City Public Health Team, Rethink, South West Organ Donation Team (NHS Blood & Transplant) and Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership Trust.

Three workshops (each repeated three times) were held on the day.

- * Blood and Organ Donation
- * Child Sexual Exploitation
- * Emotional and Mental Wellbeing

There were information stalls and children's activities including free face painting and henna art. There was also free childcare, including a creche and Bristol Play Bus.

Members of the public were also able to buy a healthy vegetarian lunch at a discounted price. People were given the opportunity to learn about Health and Wellbeing, find out how to access health services and discover more about preventative measures. The day provided information on general health issues as well as those that particularly impact on BME Communities.



Green Capital - How can faith communities play a role?

In our October Open Forum meeting we looked at the issue of 'Green Capital' and the role of faith within green issues. We met on the 20th October at St Werburghs Community Centre. Our first guest speaker was Chris Sunderland, a Director of Bristol Pound. He talked about why the Bristol Pound was set up and what 'benefits' they hoped to achieve through its introduction and circulation.

The next guest speaker, Dr Jenneth Parker, Research Director of the Schumacher Institute for Sustainable Systems, talked about an environmental conference she was hoping to deliver in early 2016 and expressed a wish that it could be delivered in partnership with the BMFF.

The final guest speaker Mark Leach, Project Manager (Sustainability), Bristol City Council, explained the background to Bristol Green Capital 2015, why BCC applied and won, what was hoped to be achieved over the year and the lasting legacy for Bristol by winning this prestigious award.

Two discussion sessions were then held and the following questions were discussed:-

Session 1 - What does Bristol Green Capital mean to you?

- * How long do you think Bristol Green Capital work has been going on?
- * Who do you think is involved with Bristol Green Capital?
- * What has been your experience of the year?
- * Do you think Bristol Green Capital could have a lasting impact?

Session 2 - What more can Bristol Green Capital do, to get you involved?

- * Are there barriers to you getting involved; if so what are they, and how can they be addressed?
- * Do you think there is a benefit or benefits to you getting involved?
- * Is this you as a person or your organisation?
- * What do you think is the unique contribution of faith and faith groups and communities to Bristol's progress in becoming an ever and even greener city?

Upcoming Event

Sunday 28 February 2016 - Bristol Diverse Doors Open Day 2016

We are in the process of organising next year's event. If you would like to take part, please let us know. This is an annual event, offering the opportunity to visit a range of places of worship. It aims to give a flavour of the many faiths in the city of Bristol. Last year a total of 16 places of worship opened their doors. In addition, 6 of the 16 venues formed a designated 'Faith Trail', each representing a different faith. At each of these six core venues there was an opportunity to participate in an issue based discussion. If you would like your place of worship to take part this year please contact us now. Call or email our Development Officer Lily Khandker. Email: info@bristolmultifaithforum.org.uk or Mobile: 07789 040267. See a range of photos from last year's event on our website here: <http://bristolmultifaithforum.org.uk/galleries/bristol-diverse-doors-open-day-2015/>



AGM and Conference on 'City of Sanctuary'

AGM: Revd Tracey Lewis the Chair of the Bristol Multi-Faith Forum took us through the AGM business. The Forum is set up to promote and support the role of faith communities in contributing to enriching the community and cultural life of Bristol. She explained that the Forum, unlike the Inter-Faith Group, is not the place where we explore the contents and beliefs of each faith, but rather where we have the opportunity to come together as people of different faiths, appreciating the diversity within that gathering, to speak as people of faith with a shared and supportive voice in the life of the city. BMFF is one of the places where faith communities can play their role in the life of the city.

The annual report was approved and a number of individuals have put themselves forward as potential members of the BMFF's steering group. Then we had a lively discussion about our 'Agenda for Change Manifesto' - future priorities for the Forum - and several priorities were suggested:

- Reaching out to all faith communities in Bristol - engaging more positively
- Female Genital Mutilation
- Preventing social isolation and helping those who are the most vulnerable
- Mental health
- Finding funding
- 'Myth busting' - removing the prejudices and preconceptions about faith communities
- Establishing a closer connection to the voluntary/community and public sectors
- Putting more pressure on Bristol City Council to support isolated faith communities and their members
- Engage more closely to get a wider range of views, reaching out to smaller faith groups
- Reaching out to young people - creating a space for dialogue, schools



Bristol City of Sanctuary: Father Richard Mackay, Chair of Bristol City of Sanctuary was our guest speaker.

Father Richard has been Chair of Bristol City of Sanctuary for three years. City of Sanctuary is a national movement made up of cities who formally welcome and support all those seeking refugee and asylum seeker status. Bristol City Council has formally agreed to the City of Sanctuary criteria, making Bristol officially a City of Sanctuary.

There are 60 million refugees globally, the highest figure since the end of World War 2. There are currently 200,000 refugees in the Mediterranean area trying to get to a place of sanctuary in Europe. There are 3,000 refugees trying to cross the English Channel.

Father Richard said there are a number of organisations in Bristol that currently support refugees. These include Refugee Rights and Borderlands (an organisation formed as a result of work to support refugees at St. Nicholas of Tolentino).

A number of organisations have signed up to City of Sanctuary, in addition to Bristol City Council. These include trade unions, places of education such as colleges and schools, as well as faith communities.

Most people do not realise the draconian conditions that are set by the Home Office in the UK, where 80% of applications for asylum are refused. In effect their policy is that an applicant 'is guilty until proved innocent'. The appeal process is a long and tortuous one and it leaves people in limbo with no money or accommodation. Even if an asylum seeker's application is ultimately accepted, their problems do not stop there, as they still need to find decent accommodation and are struggling to find work. Much of the accommodation that refugees and asylum seekers have allocated for them, is substandard and would not be allocated to anyone else.

If applications are withdrawn, people are left destitute and homeless. If people do not have legal status even their driving licences are taken away. People accused of terrorist activity may be detained for as long as three years without trial and are forgotten about.

Virtually anyone seeking refugee and asylum status will have suffered trauma in the country they are fleeing from and they will need a great deal of support to survive in the community. Bristol City of Sanctuary welcomes help from volunteers and other offers of support. A number of refugees from Syria will be arriving in Bristol in the near future.

Supporting Mental Health Care

Our June Open Forum meeting looked at the issue of Mental Health Care. We worked with Healthwatch Bristol and the aim was that out of the meeting, faith communities and health professionals would come to work better together.

The first guest speaker was Monira Chowdhury, Community Access Support Service (CASS) Manager. She explained the role and aims of her service and why Mental Health and Wellbeing within faith communities was being prioritised by the NHS.

The second guest speaker was Ellen Devine, Healthwatch Bristol Service Coordinator. She explained the role of Healthwatch Bristol and asked that people be as open as they could about the quality of service they received from Mental Health Service Providers and professionals.

The meeting then broke into four groups and three discussion sessions were held, focussing on: How does a person's faith affect the way they recognise changes in their mental health? How can faith communities better understand how they can work with health professionals? What do Health professionals need to understand about your faith when deciding treatment or support for mental health issues?

All the feedback provided by the group has been inputted to Healthwatch Bristol's database of issues and concerns. It is included in the Healthwatch Bristol Quarterly Report. Healthwatch will be sharing this report with Healthwatch partners including Bristol Clinical Commissioning Group, Bristol City Council, the Care Quality Commission, NHS England and Healthwatch England. The report will also be presented to the Healthwatch Bristol Advisory Group to propose further uptake of the issues identified in this report. The report will be available on the Healthwatch Bristol website (www.healthwatchbristol.co.uk)

There are plans for future partnership work between the Forum and Healthwatch Bristol. Healthwatch welcomes and encourages members of BMFF to continue to contribute their feedback to them using the contact details below. Healthwatch also supports members of community groups to become Volunteer Champions so that they can represent the experiences and needs of their community group. If you would like to find out more about volunteering with Healthwatch, please contact them. Text them - text bris followed by your message to 07860 021 603, email at info@healthwatchbristol.co.uk or call 0117 2690400 or visit the website www.healthwatchbristol.co.uk

For full notes of this meeting see the publications page of our website: <http://bristolmultifaithforum.org.uk/publications/general-reports/>

Stand Together for Peace

On Thursday 6 August 2015 Bristol Multi-Faith Forum held a Peace Vigil in light of the events in Tunisia, France, Kuwait and across the Middle East - and ten years on from the events of 7/7. We invited people to join with us, to Stand Together for Peace. Our vigil took place from 3.45pm to 5pm on College Green in Bristol, with a one minute silence at 4.30pm. This event was open to all and representatives from faith groups across the City were present, sharing their thoughts and prayers. The Mayor, The Lord Mayor, High Sherriff and Police Commissioner amongst others, also spoke. For more information and to see all our photos from the day click here: <http://bristolmultifaithforum.org.uk/peace-vigil-2015-standing-together-for-peace/>



Keep up to date with all our events:

On our website: www.bristolmultifaithforum.org.uk

On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Bristol-Multi-Faith-Forum/500492823342869>

On Twitter: <https://twitter.com/bristolmultifai>

Also a reminder that we now produce a **fortnightly e-bulletin**, with events, information, resources and funding news from across Bristol. If you would like anything included in the e-bulletin please email it to us at johanna@bristolmultifaithforum.org.uk



Contact Details: Lily Khandker

Bristol Multi-Faith Forum

Email: info@bristolmultifaithforum.org.uk

Mobile: 07789 040267

Web: www.bristolmultifaithforum.org.uk