

PECKHAM INTER FAITH WALK Saturday 5th January 2013

report from Eileen Conn, vice-chair SMFF (Southwark Multi Faith Forum)

Copleston Centre Church

On Saturday 5th January 2013, about 50 local residents and supporters from the South London Inter Faith Group, gathered in Copleston Centre Church in Bellenden the south west corner of Peckham. We brought together members of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, and Sikh faiths, as well as atheist and agnostic people. The theme for the walk was Peace and at each venue there was a brief account of Peace from that faith's perspective, followed by some questions and answers. After some creative banner making and light refreshments and networking, Rev Paul Collier (who organised the walk with Jamille Mohammed, Secretary of the Peckham Islamic Centre, and Emma Dickinson from the police Safer Neighbourhood Team), gave a brief introduction to the venue and to the Christian view of Peace. Paul said St Saviour's church was built in 1881 for residents in the new housing taking the place then of market gardens made redundant by the new railways. The church was renamed in 1981 when the congregation merged with the United Reform Chapel in Bellenden Road, now the Pentecostal Faith Chapel. The congregation alternates each Sunday between the two different forms of Sunday worship. We then listened to Trinley, a monk from the Tibetan Buddhist Centre in Manor Place, Walworth, who spoke about Buddhist practice and its understanding of peace.

Peckham Islamic Centre

The large group walked from the Copleston Centre along Choumert Rd past Faith Chapel, across Bellenden Rd, to the Peckham Islamic Centre in Choumert Grove. The Centre was built in its current form within the last 15 years on the site of a small mosque there which evolved after the second world war. It has recently had a third floor added and its two minarets completed. This last phase of the work has been carried out by local Benedict O'Looney Architects, who are restoring the Old Waiting Room and original staircase at Peckham Rye station. At the mosque, now some 70 of us, we went to the large meeting hall on the second floor, to hear a brief talk on Islam and the Islamic view of peace from the Imams. At 1pm we went to the prayer hall on the ground floor and stood at the back during prayers. Afterwards we returned to the meeting room for light refreshments and a short question and answer session.

Rye Lane Baptist Chapel

We departed on our walk into Peckham town centre through Choumert Road market, and into Rye Lane, past the historic station. We walked through the throng of Saturday afternoon shoppers, holding banners declaring our inter faith walk for Peace. Our next stop was Rye Lane Baptist Chapel one of the magnificent historic buildings on Rye Lane. This was built in the 1860s to replace the original chapel, demolished to build Peckham Rye station. There we had an introduction to the Christian Baptist view of Peace, from Dave Simms, the Youth Minister. The Chapel was in the middle of the riots which happened in August 2011, and it happened so suddenly that people in the church couldn't leave. Many prayers were said during the hours of the riots. The Chapel's work with young people is aimed at giving them interesting activities to ensure that their lives do not need riots to give them some fulfilment.

Baha'i faith group

We walked the last leg of our journey through the town centre to Peckham town square. A room had not been available in the Peckham Pulse so the police had made available their meeting room in the police station just along the High Street, for the Baha'i faith group contribution to conclude our journey. The large group of inter faith walkers crowded into the meeting room and were served welcome soft drinks, humus snacks and biscuits. There we heard from Riaz Sanatian from the Baha'i faith group that meets in Peckham Rye. Riaz thanked the police for helping with the venue for the Baha'i contribution. He said the Bahá'í teachings emphasize that all people, as creations of one God, are part of one human family, and being able to recognise this is part of the way to Peace. Volunteers read out a text provided by Riaz from the writings of each of several religions – including Islam, Jewish, Christian, Native American, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Baha'i - which showed that this approach to human maturity, and this recognition is in fact part of each religious faith.

In the words from Baha'i *Gleanings*: *"Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbour, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and*

guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts...

Conclusion

The police expressed their appreciation for such a positive event in Peckham. Inspector Linda Upton and Sgt Emma Dickinson and several police school cadets had been on the whole walk. In the concluding discussion, the feeling was that we should have more interfaith walks involving additional faith group places, and there was also potential scope for education events to spread understanding of different religions, and their common nature and shared views about humanity and good behaviour.

For further information:

* about Peckham inter faith activity, contact Rev Paul Collier paul.collier@colestoncentre.org.uk

* to join the SMFF email news list, email: SMFF southwarkmultifaithforum@gmail.com

Information about SMFF (Southwark Multi Faith Forum)

SMFF is a resident-led group for people to connect with others on inter-faith and multi-faith matters of common interest in Southwark. We provide an email news service with information about inter-faith & multi-faith matters. To join the SMFF mailing list to receive the SMFF News Emails, please email: SMFF southwarkmultifaithforum@gmail.com

Eileen Conn, SMFF vice-chair, said *“The interfaith walk was a wonderful experience and a chance for local residents to meet some of our other-faith neighbours and learn more about each other. The walk was open to all faiths or none. It was an enjoyable way to learn about other faiths, inter faith work, our multi faith society, and to visit interesting buildings in central Peckham. We will be developing more of these kinds of activities and glad to advise others in Southwark how they can create them for their own neighbourhoods.”*