

Hull & East Riding faith2faith Celebration



One of the many features of faith2faith we admired was the courage in mounting such a high-profile event.



The most prestigious civic building in the region was its setting. The mayor welcomed us to the City Hall, the BBC compered ably, the Bishop was around, and SACRE Chairs

and Vice Chairs and Councillors. The youth circuit included local members of the National Youth Parliament. "Save the Children" were there, the Adult Faith Forum of Yorkshire and Humberside made notable quality contributions: the Vice President giving a keynote speech and leading a workshop, the President giving closing reflections.

I met members of at least five major world faiths, mixed in with many unlabelled and on their spiritual search. The gathering was featured on the wide screen of current news in the City Centre outside, and would be reported in local radio's Sunday programme.

But most important of all, of course: the young people, 180 of them, from at least 8 local secondary schools across the city (and surrounding countryside) which had worked with this project. The students arrived a bit shy, but gained confidence through the day, buzzing in groups and expressing themselves in question, comment, argument, epigram, sketch, poem, drama and music. Some of these expressions will find themselves collated into local news mail, (even into a national RE journal?).

Right at the outset, Natasha and Kathy from Archbishop Thurstan CE School set us an example by introducing a clip of the DVD: interviews conducted with two young adherents of Judaism.

After an imaginative range of workshops, under good leadership and taken seriously by the students, some deep questions faced the multi-faith panel in the final plenary:-

- Most religions have a basic core of agreement, so why the conflict?
- Will we reach our goal of integrating our faiths? When?
- How can so many religions claim to be true when they condone war and other immoralities?
- As society evolves and develops, will religion continue to play a role of any importance?
- If humans are all of equal importance to God, why was Jesus so special?

On top of all these achievements, the day was blessed for me by a keynote speech from a Muslim who feels peace to be at the heart of Islam and Jihad to be a sense of responsibility to her family and others and who tries to hear the things which divide us from one another; and by a closing reflection from a Methodist minister who quoted a Muslim Bosnian survivor "When one group of humans starts to treat another as less than human, that is the beginning of the end for us all", and urged us not to be threatened by difference but to see it as part of God's rich gift. In the cinema we all laugh and cry at the same things, so why not around religion?

So is this event the culmination of faith2faith? No! There's an important DVD to be fine-tuned, and circulated into active use. There's a crucial event on 12th December in Leeds University, when young people from schools and colleges and the youth circuit join the adult inter-faith forum on the platform: working together to challenge injustice, and we do hope a Young People's Faiths Forum may emerge. This is the start. Oh yes, and there may be another Big Event by the sea in the Spring of 2008. Listen out, and watch the screen.

Well done Marilyn Cowling, Sue Holmes and the Hull/ East Riding alliance.

Tristram Jenkins, NASACRE Link

'I learnt that there is a lot more to the world than meets the eye and a bit about religions. I also confirmed some of my own beliefs'.

This was the view of one student who took part in the faith2faith on Friday 10th November 2006 in Hull.

Attended by 163 young people from eight Hull and East Riding schools, the conference offered workshops in drama, philosophy, Indian dance, gamalan music making, creative writing, living Islam today and face2face dialogue.

This was the first inter-faith conference for young people in the Humber region and featured the work of students who had been working together on the interfaith project throughout the year, visiting each other's places of worship and, under the guidance of a professional film maker, producing records of their experiences.

The City Hall in Hull was the ideal venue for a stimulating, fun day of activities enjoyed by students, teachers, invited civic guests, SACRE members and local faith groups. Guests' comments included:

- 'an eye-opening experience ... there is a real buzz about the day';
- 'important that faith is about action';
- 'the key to moving forward is getting young people talking about issues so we can overcome barriers and break down stereotypes'.

One teacher commented: 'thoroughly absorbing, full of life and vitality. All of our young people had an invigorating, stimulating experience'; and another: 'really enjoyable, good range of workshops. Pupils enjoyed the day and all of our group came up with something new about RE!'

Revd. Dr Inderjit Bhogal, Director of Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum, stated that he was 'impressed with the event. Meetings like this are essential to our education and understanding. Don't let it be a one off event'.

Building on the success of the conferences, young people across Hull and East Riding are meeting together to plan a conference at Bridlington in Spring 2008 which we hope will be part of the Spirit of the North project. Hull and East Riding SACREs are continuing to work with Hull DEC to offer more young people an opportunity to explore faith in today's society.

This work has a broader emphasis than the sphere of SACRE and will address aspects of the local authorities' community cohesion agenda and impacts on a wider range of young people.

We have been involved with faith2faith since the start. It has allowed us to meet people from other faiths, be involved in many activities and to learn how to shoot film and edit it. We have been on many visits to places like the synagogue, Lincoln Cathedral and Leeds University.

We really enjoyed the conference at Hull City Hall. We were unsure what it would be like but it was a fun day which allowed us to try many new things. It was great to see some of the boys in traditional Indian costume! Three of us were able to go to the first regional inter-faith conference for young people at Leeds University. We had a really interesting day meeting a wide range of people.

We hope to be able to continue with the project as it has been educational and fun.

Bridie **Chapman**, Student at Archbishop Thurstan CE (VC) School

Credo is a Christian drama community, with the slogan 'to believe is to act'. Our faith is the foundation for all we do, whether in communicating this to others or getting behind campaigns such as Fair Trade. Therefore faith2faith seemed a brilliant conference to be getting involved with.

Knowing many young people do not associate themselves to a particular faith or consider the questions that it brings with it about the greater scheme of things, the idea that there's more to life than what we see and face everyday, I felt this was a great opportunity for everyone to place themselves in the position of having a set faith and in doing so hopefully challenge the thinking of it being just for the 'religious few'. Therefore not only does this encourage understanding between all those with a different religion but also causes others to consider the possibility of it for themselves.

We put the young people into groups of 6 of the most known faiths: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism giving them a set of beliefs told them to advertise their faith to each other. One of the groups did this in the style of a cheer routine, another in freeze frames. Then playing 'devil's advocate' we told them religion was the cause of so many problems and would be banned unless they could prove that unity was possible, giving them a social issue, such as school bullying, to work on. They had to create a piece a drama with another religious group showing how they would tackle the problem together using their previously worked on belief system.

Having not long started with Credo as their gap year worker, I was quite nervous about leading the drama workshops, but the young people were keen to take part and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Their creative ideas were impressive and it was great to see so much enthusiasm. It certainly caused me to think about what's important in our faith and I hope the workshop and the day as a whole left the young people with a few questions answered and a few more raised.

Julia Clapp, workshop leader, Credo

The poetry workshops were a joy to run. The pupils were told that the exercise would not be graded or marked in any way; there was no competition, only an opportunity to write their own thoughts. It was rewarding to see how they responded and realised their efforts were appreciated.

They worked with an exercise where I give them a starter word and tell them to just write whatever comes to mind; this includes a word I give them to add every few minutes and see where their thoughts take them - a stream of consciousness. They really did write non-stop.

As they shared their results with each other, I was able to encourage them to see that each of them had expressed something of themselves and their own unique view of the world, and that their individual perspective is important and interesting to others. I did manage to see each person's written work and suggest they use a particular line or phrase as a starting point for a poem or story. Many of them took their work home. The object of the exercise was for the young people first of all to realise that each of them had a contribution to make, and for them to understand the value and uniqueness of themselves and others.

Norah Hanson, creative writing workshop leader . Norah is one of the Subtle Flame poets of Beverley, and belongs to the Mutiny poetry group.