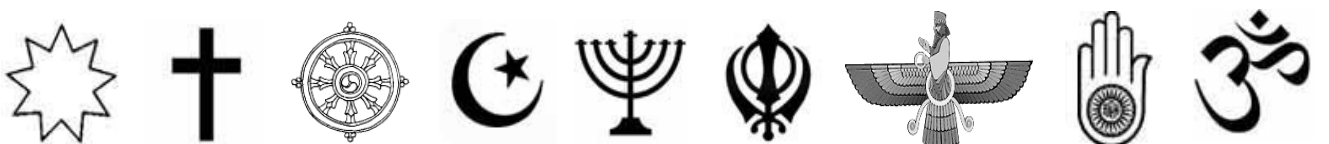


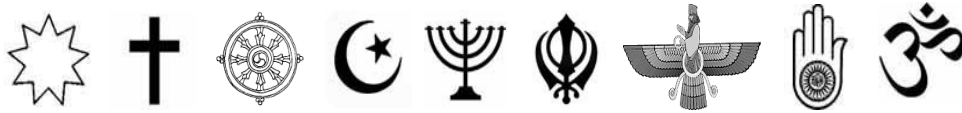
# Elmbridge Multi-faith Forum

## NEWSLETTER

Issue 12

Spring/Summer 2009





Since our last Newsletter we have . . .

- Published and circulated 1,000 printed copies of our Autumn 2008 Newsletter and added it to our website
- Held on 21st January an evening to discuss our project in the St John's area of Walton
- Visited on 7th February the Shinnyo-En Japanese Buddhist Centre
- Attended an 'Aspects of Judaism' evening on 18<sup>th</sup> February at the Reform Synagogue in Weybridge
- Joined our Ahmadiyya friends at their Peace Symposium on 21st March
- Visited on 28th March the Coptic Church in Stevenage
- Continued our work with the Elmbridge Community Partnership, the Equality and Diversity Forum, the Police and the South-East England Faith Forum

## **Membership**

We are always pleased to welcome new individuals as members. The annual subscription is £10, for which you will receive the newsletters and priority booking for events and visits, as well as invitations to meetings. The 'subscription year' runs from 1st April to 31st March. We now have over one hundred members.

For enquiries about membership, please contact the Membership Secretary:

**Phyllis Woodhead**  
**01372 468783**

## GRANTS

Our work during 2008-9 has been helped by a grant of £625 from Elmbridge Borough Council, for which we are very grateful.

In November 2008 we learned that we had been successful in our application for a grant of £4000 from the Surrey Community Foundation for the purposes of:

- Regular publication and circulation of printed Newsletters
- Publication of 'Faith Briefings'
- Development of the Community Integration project in the St. John's area of Walton
- Family Integration Project in Claygate

The present Newsletter is funded by this grant. Work is in progress on the other areas and will be discussed in the course of this Newsletter.

We await a response to our request for funding for the next two years from the 'Faiths in Action' programme of the Community Development Foundation.



### **The South-East England Faith Forum (SEEFF)**

Nabil was on the Organising Committee for a conference in Reading on 28th April to plan for the next 3 years.

The role of the forum is to share information on inter-faith initiatives in the South East.

**WALTON PROJECT MEETING**  
**Churchgate House, Cobham**  
**21st January, 2009**

The purposes of this meeting were:

- To show the film made on April 10th 2008 in the Community Centre in Walton St. John's (see Winter Newsletter)
- To meet Stella Burgess of Elmbridge Borough Council and the 'Love of Learning' consultants who facilitated the project
- To update members and discuss plans for the future

After some debate, there was general agreement that it was right for us not just to learn about each other's faiths but also to work together for the good of the community. The Government had, indeed, just launched a 'Faiths in Action' programme.

The Residents of St. John's had organised and enjoyed several activities, and the EMF Committee had been asked to help with a 'Mothers and Daughters Make-over Evening' on 26th January. This has since proved to be a success.

The next major project will be to make another film on the 'before and after' principle, and it is intended that a grant to EMF should help to fund this. We hope that the film can be made at the end of June this year.

Phyllis Woodhead spoke about plans to assist the police in community work. At the time of the meeting, the need seemed to be for an 'outward bound' activity in which parents and their children would compete as teams. This has been overtaken by events, and we have been asked for help with a scheme in which voluntary street patrols will be available at night to help young people with problems.

About forty members and friends attended. They enjoyed both a lively discussion and the buffet provided by Margaret Leamon, Susie Carpenter and Zhen Gibson, whom we thank.



## Visit to the Shinnyo-En Japanese Buddhist Centre Long Ditton - Saturday, 7th February 2009 *from Nabil M Mustapha*

### **Introduction**

Our interest in visiting this Centre was triggered about two years ago, when it was realised that Shinnyo-En is a Japanese Buddhist Religious Order which we knew nothing about, in spite of its being well within our own Elmbridge.

Twenty two members gathered at the Centre at 2pm as arranged, and were welcomed by the customary Japanese courtesy and hospitality. The programme had been arranged very carefully and allowed good time for interaction and absorption of the information to be gathered. The welcoming group was a joyful mix of Japanese and English people, the main speaker, Mr Patrick O'Connor being an Englishman resident in the USA.

### **Opening Prayer**

Having been ushered into the "Inner Temple" setting with the inspirational 16ft. (5 metres) "Reclining Buddha" sculpture fully displayed, the Resident Priest, the Rev. Yamaguchi opened the meeting with his prayer chants, accompanied by well spaced beats on a bell. The prayer was short and it was instrumental in setting the spiritual atmosphere for the rest of the meeting.



### **Screen Presentation on Shinnyo-En by Mr Patrick O'Connor**

Patrick gave us a good description of the history of Shinnyo-En and its Founder Master Shinjo Ito and his wife Tomoji, who played a critical role in laying the foundation of what the order has become today. Patrick responded to questions at the end of his presentation, and described in more detail the significance of four smaller statues, two on either side of the "Reclining Buddha".

### **History and Teachings of Shinnyo-En**

Shinnyo-En accepts the Buddha, known as Siddhartha Guatama as the Founder of Buddhism, but the Japanese name for the Buddha is "*Shakyamuni*". It is known that the Buddha was born in the year 580 BC in the village of Lumbini in what is now known as Nepal. He was born into a Royal family and had no experience of any sufferings, particularly as a result of sickness, age or death. Having grown up and married, he one day left his palace and was faced with the three realities of suffering

when he saw in one instance an old man, a sick man and a corpse. He also encountered a monk, and realised that this was a sign that he should relinquish his royal life and the trappings of luxury and pursue his personal quest for inner peace and harmony. Under a Bodhi (Asoka) tree, in a moment of deep meditation he was transformed and “Enlightened”, and thus became “The Buddha”. The deity Brahman appeared before him and said: “*O Great Holy One, go forth and teach the path to truth. There are those who will understand and benefit from your efforts*” The teachings that came out of his personal quest, can be summarised as a path for attaining ultimate freedom from ignorance and craving. The end result expected, would be that, in everyday terms, true happiness and success is in realising one’s own potential to be awakened and liberalised from angst and unhappiness. Moreover, Shakyamuni (Buddha) preached that “*Wisdom*” arises naturally through perseverance and natural experience, and that we should develop “*compassion*” for others and work towards the “*Welfare of others*”.

Shinnyo-En is an independent Buddhist order based on the “*Nirvana Sutra*” and the Shingon school of Japanese Buddhism, one of Japan’s oldest traditions. Founded in 1930, Shinnyo-En is now a global community of about one million in almost one hundred centres and nineteen countries.

The name Shinnyo-En means “a place without borders where all who desire to bring forth their true nature are welcome”. Thus the values of kindness, sincerity, service, compassion, respect of human life regardless of gender, age, racial origin, or religious affiliation are all enshrined within the teachings, and within the spirit of Buddhism in general. Shinnyo-En’s Founder, in one of his favourite saying states that: “The enlightenment of one person leads to the enlightenment of countless others” Shinnyo-En thus focuses on the “*Esoteric*” aspects of Buddhism as distinct from the “*Exoteric*” aspects.

### **The Three Pillars of Shinnyo-En Practice are:**

- Learning:* Active assimilation of the Teachings or Dharma. This leads to wisdom and the ability to teach.
- Teaching:* Sharing one’s wisdom and Dharma with others.
- Service:* This is a natural extension of teaching and is an expression of selflessness and getting closer to one’s true self.

### **Practice**

Followers of Shinnyo-En engage in formal services of chanting and sharing of personal experiences in meditation, under guidance or otherwise, and in services to the community. The aim is to emphasise the real quest for inner harmony and inner and outer peace.

## **Founder of Shinnyo-En**

The Great Master Shinjo Ito was born into a Buddhist family in 1906. In 1936 he entered Kyoto's Daigoji monastery, the head temple of the Daigo school of Shingon Buddhism. He mastered the Shingon esoteric teachings. He branched off from mainstream Shingon Buddhism by grafting the Nirvana Sutra - which emphasises Buddhism for lay practitioners - onto esoteric Shingon. He also instituted sesshin training (mentored meditative training aimed at "Touching the Essence") and a mentoring system. The Great Master's wife, Tomoji is considered the co-founder of this Buddhist order.

The Great Master, at the young age of fourteen found a hidden talent in himself, that of carving sculptures. This was later to become very useful when he made a sculpture of his two sons, who regrettably died at young ages and within a short period of time between their deaths, but more significantly when he decided to make the sculpture of the "Reclining Buddha". While the Buddha died at age eighty, his aging body was not accompanied by any aging of the mind or spirit. The Master's expression of this in the sculpture was to work the Buddha's body in a reclining position with the flowing robe covering his body, but to sculpture his face as that of a young person who has not aged. The picture can be seen on the Shinnyo-En website. The Master, Shinjo-Ito was succeeded by his daughter, who became known as Shinso-Ito. Her father passed away in 1989, and she is still the Head of the Order at present.

## **Our Farewell**

The visit ended at about 4.30 pm, a little beyond the arranged time, but both the welcoming group and us were in no hurry to part. We were generously offered 'tea' (including Japanese green tea), coffee, Japanese snaps, cakes and biscuits, and everyone took a carved key ring present on leaving. We all felt quite gratified and happy, and we are hoping that the EMF will be privileged with an on-going relationship with Shinnyo-En.





## ASPECTS OF JUDAISM

An Evening at the North West Surrey Synagogue, Weybridge

18th February 2009

from Nabil M Mustapha and Geoff Morris

Over 40 people attended this fascinating meeting, which was followed, in typical Jewish style, by generous refreshments. The meeting was chaired by Paul Glicker, the Chairman of the Synagogue, and the speakers were Mrs Phyllis Conway (Orthodox Judaism) and Mrs Avril Hallé (Reform Judaism).

**Mrs Conway** is a long-time involved member of Staines Synagogue. She is Life President of the Ladies Guild, as well as being the main synagogue guide for visiting schools in the area. She and her husband Stan are EMF Committee members.

**Mrs Hallé** is a Vice-President of NW Surrey Synagogue. She teaches the Bar and Bat Mitzvah pupils as well as Hebrew and Judaism to adults, including those converting to Judaism. She is a lay reader and also guides school visits. She was Head Teacher of the Religion School for 12 years.

**Orthodox Judaism:** We learned from Phyllis that, in Orthodox synagogues, all religious duties are performed by males. The men and the women sit separately, the men wearing skull caps and the married women covering their heads. There are no women rabbis and any male may conduct the service. The rabbi (which means teacher) usually officiates at services, or a male lay reader. Sometimes a cantor will assist with or lead a service. A *Synagogue* building has an 'Ark', where the Torah scrolls are kept, with the 'Ner Tamid' (everlasting light) above. There is also a 'bimah', a raised reading desk.

**Worship:** As well as Sabbath and festival services, some synagogues have daily morning and evening services if numbers allow. In order to hold a communal service a quorum of ten adult males is required. Boys are considered adult in ritual terms at the age of 13 when they become Bar Mitzvah. Girls may have a Bat Mitzvah ceremony at the age of 12.

**Sabbath:** Phyllis described the seventh day of the week as the 'day of rest'. It starts at sunset on Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday. (All festivals also begin and end at sunset). The family tends to have all work done and the evening meal prepared before the Sabbath comes in. When the men return from synagogue after the evening service, the family brings in the Sabbath with three major blessings before the meal - over the candles, wine and special bread known as challah. There is also a blessing over children if they are present. The meal is usually a traditional one and is followed by grace after meals. Saturday is mostly spent going to



synagogue for the morning service, and having a restful day as no work is to be done. There is a small ceremony marking the end of the Sabbath, called Havdalah, (meaning ‘differentiation’) which includes blessings over wine and a special plaited candle.

**The Jewish home:** Every Jewish home has a ‘mezzuzah’ on an outside doorpost. This is a container for a small parchment on which a scribe has written a prayer called the ‘Shema’. The parchment, like the Torah scrolls, is made from the skin of a ‘kosher’ animal. The home contains many artefacts used in ritual observance, such as candlesticks and wine goblets.

**Jewish food customs:** Jews must keep meat and milk products separate, and must not consume milk or its products earlier than 3 hours after a meat meal. Not mixing meat and milk applies also to crockery, cutlery, saucepans and all implements. Other rules include eating only animals that have cloven hooves and chew the cud. (This of course excludes any form of pig meat). Meat has to be soaked to remove all blood. Birds of prey are not permitted. Fish must have fins and scales, which excludes all shellfish.

**Marriage:** For a Jewish marriage ceremony to be held, Jews may only be married to other Jews. The ceremony takes place under a canopy and can be held in a synagogue or any other venue.

**Death:** Jews have their own cemeteries, and the deceased are buried as soon as possible. There are no flowers, only prayers. There then follows a period of seven days intensive mourning.

**Festivals:** Phyllis described Jewish life as ‘structured around religious observances’:

‘*Rosh Hashana*’ is the Jewish New Year, where people examine their behaviour over the past year. A ram’s horn is blown in the service. Special foods eaten are apples and honey.

‘*Yom Kippur*’ is the Day of Atonement when Jews fast for a full 25 hours, taking in no water or food. At this time they ask for forgiveness for the sins they have committed during the past year.

‘*Sukkot*’ or the Festival of Tabernacles is in remembrance of the huts or booths the Jews lived in while on their 40-year journey to the Promised Land after their liberation from slavery in Egypt. They now often build a hut and for the seven days of the festival may eat in it

‘*Chanukkah*’ or Festival of Lights commemorates the victory of the Maccabees over the Assyrians who tried to outlaw Jewish worship and

defiled the Temple. During a period of eight days an increasing number of candles are lit each evening in a nine branched candlestick. 'Purim' or the Festival of Lots, is the story of the Book of Esther when Jews again survived the threat of elimination, this time in Persia.

'Passover' is a remembrance of the delivery from slavery at the start of the Exodus from Egypt. It falls around Easter, and a good spring clean of the home is undertaken. It is an eight day festival during which only unleavened bread (matzah) is eaten. No other food with leaven is permitted. On the first two nights a home service called a Seder is held.

'Shavuot' or the Festival of Weeks commemorates the receiving by Moses at Mount Sinai of the Ten Commandments, which is part of the 613 commandments in the Torah, and where the Covenant of God with the People of Israel is reiterated. Milk foods are eaten at this time, particularly cheesecake.

**Orthodox Judaism:** Following this summary description of salient aspects of the observance of Judaism and the major festivals by Phyllis, we had the pleasure of additional aspects from Mrs Avril Hallé. Avril was born in South Africa into an Orthodox Jewish family. She joined a Reform synagogue when she married Derick, who is also an EMF Committee member. She opened her talk with a quote from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogues, who wrote '*There are many paths to faith*'. This, she said, also applies to individual religions and is so within Judaism. There are 'Orthodox' and 'Progressive' streams, both of these encompassing a broad spectrum of interpretation and practice. Progressive Judaism includes the 'Reform' and the 'Liberal' Synagogues.

Reform Judaism originated in Germany in the 19th century, when European Jews were influenced by the Enlightenment movement in Europe. The first Reform synagogue established in the UK was the West London Synagogue in 1842. Jews can be 'Ashkenazim', those from Eastern & Middle Europe, and 'Sephardim', those from Spain, Portugal and N. Africa, depending on where their ancestors went when exiled from Palestine by the Romans in 70 CE.

In Reform and Liberal Judaism egalitarianism is important. Thus women can lead services and can become 'Rabbis' as well as leaders of the congregation. The prayers are similar to those used by the Orthodox but a proportion is read in English in order to be understood. The weekly reading from the Torah (the Pentateuch or the Five Books of Moses) is read in Hebrew but translated into English. A few prayers are recited in Aramaic.

Avril said that the Ten Commandments are included in the 613 commandments which are found in the Torah. Some are negative ('Thou shalt not...') and others are positive. Some of these cannot be applied nowadays, for example those regarding sacrifices, which have not taken place since the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 CE. The 'Talmud', a codification of the laws, was developed by the early rabbis in the post biblical era. Orthodox Jews believe that the whole of the Torah was directly dictated to Moses by God on Mount Sinai and that this included the 'Oral Torah' from which the Talmud evolved. They believe that this Revelation was then complete. Reform Jews believe the Torah represents the word of God but that there is continuing revelation of God's will to this day and that as the world changes Jewish practice needs to be modified, as it always has been in the past, to continue to be meaningful in any age. Reform Jews believe that, 'Kavanah', which means 'intention', is important in the observance of prayer and ritual. The Unity of God is paramount to all Jews.

Thus, in general, Reform Jews might not interpret driving on the Sabbath as 'work'. Work is prohibited on the Sabbath in Torah and how work is defined differs in the various strands of Judaism. There is a range of observances and individual judgement is important. So, for example, gardening may be considered as work to some or as leisure to others. Thus it is the *spirit* of the law that is taken into consideration. There is generally a wide range of Jewish observance from the virtually secular to the very observant.

God made a covenant with Abraham as described in Genesis and this was confirmed as a Covenant with the whole Jewish people on Mount Sinai before entering the 'Promised Land'.

People can be converted to Judaism by both Orthodox and Progressive rabbinic courts. The Progressives welcome conversion but the Orthodox authorities ask people to wait before beginning the conversion process in order to ensure sincerity. In either case there is a long period of study and training in Judaism, Jewish practice and history and in the Hebrew language to assist in participating in services and study.

Some Jews believe that the whole of Torah was revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai. Others believe that they were written down later. Thus Reform Jews support the notion of continuing Revelation, allowing Judaism to keep up to date with technological and academic development.

A healthy discussion followed, with quite searching questions from the audience. A vote of thanks was given, and there followed the customary and generous outlay of food and refreshments, allowing an extended period of socialisation, exchange, and discussion.

A vote of thanks was given by the EMF Chairman, Nabil Mustapha. The visit was definitely a spiritually uplifting event, and a further cementing of relationships fostered by Elmbridge Multifaith Forum. In conclusion, the meeting demonstrated the similarities as well as aspects of the spectrum within Judaism, with the basic tenets accepted by all strands of Judaism.



**An eventful evening at  
THE BAITUL FUTUH MOSQUE  
21st March, 2009  
*Glenys Sahay***

On Saturday March 21<sup>st</sup>09 I was privileged to be among the six hundred special guests invited to the UK Peace Symposium 2009 at what is one of the largest mosques in western Europe, and yet lies on our own doorstep in Morden.

We were greeted with extreme warmth and courtesy by what almost amounted to a small army of guides and event organisers. Having signed in at the reception desk, our allocated guide Nasil was a fund of information, and happy to answer a constant barrage of questions as we were conducted from room to room.

The walls of the exhibition hall with its vast upper gallery were lined with the history, outlined beliefs, and moral practices of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. This community was founded in India in 1889 under the first Kalifa (leader) in a movement to restore the true teachings of Islam around the world, some of which have been distorted with the passage of time. The word ISLAM means PEACE and can not condone the violent destructive actions of extremists. Jihad by the sword was ended over a hundred years ago by the will of God, and now refers only to the rigorous cleansing of the soul. A strict tenet of the faith is to love and support the country where you have settled as you are then a functioning part of that community. Ahmadiyya Muslims have adopted as their slogan “Love all and hate none”.

The Mosque is a complete complex of buildings with different purposes and functions and can accommodate 13000 people. Combined with the permanent exhibition area is an extensive library including books on all religions and a wide range of educational books magazines and journals. There is a computer area and also a children’s section.

Television studios are located on the ground floor and their own global satellite television channel, MTA International (Sky 787 in UK) is managed by volunteers and features religious and educational programmes 24 hours a day in up to six languages. Adjacent to these studios is a homeopathic clinic where qualified practitioners dispense their remedies free of charge.

The three larger multipurpose halls the Nasir Hall, the Tahir Hall and the Noor Hall accommodate 1500, 2500, and 1000 people respectively. Apart from business offices, two large kitchens catering for all functions, a book shop selling books and souvenirs, there are also a number of overnight guest rooms.

The whole complex of buildings is known as the Baitul Futuh Mosque although the actual true Mosque is situated at the rear of the site and contains two enormous prayer halls each accommodating 1800 people and situated one above the other. The men pray in the upper hall which is well-lit, and spacious, with a soft springy carpet but no furniture or wall adornment that might distract the focus of the mind. Worshippers face an alcove representing the direction of Mecca, in much the same way as Christian altars face east to give a unified flow or force field for our prayers. Inscribed around the base of the large domed ceiling are words in Arabic which translated mean “Be reminded that real peace is with the remembrance of God”

The women’s hall lying immediately below is the same size and design and equally beautiful; although lit with natural light in place of open windows, the ventilation system has been cleverly incorporated inside a circle of supporting pillars.

A specially adapted crèche with kitchen and baby changing facilities is also incorporated into the women’s hall allowing children to participate but its thickened glass walls prevent any disturbance from noise.

Observation galleries look into both halls and will accommodate a further 2000 people. An average congregation at the main Friday ceremony is between 4,000 and 6,000 with a total of around 10,000 on special days.

It is not permitted to wear shoes in these areas - yes I was able to find my own pair again later - and both men and women cover their heads out of respect. I was temporarily fascinated by the variety of headgear sported by the men, from forage caps, pork-pies, flat skull caps, and best of all something resembling a pancake mounted on a fur or quilted base.

The enormous cost of building such a vast and beautiful edifice was entirely met by voluntary contributions from the faithful. A dedicated Ahmadiyyan Muslim tithes 6.25% of his annual gross income to his mosque.

When we could walk no further we were all escorted to a banqueting hall with tables beautifully appointed and decorated with roses. (The marvellous displays throughout the whole Mosque of wall brackets and tubs full of amaryllis, palms, and spring flowers must have been tended by a whole team of gardeners and should not go unrecorded).

We listened to several thought-provoking talks, given and televised by members of parliament, including Vivendra Sharma, Susan Kramer, Baroness Nicholson, Justine Greening, Siobhan McDonagh, and Chris Grayling. Councillor Kyysia Williams, deputy Mayor of Merton also spoke and the final address was by Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad himself as Head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and which stressed the importance of peace and understanding between nations.

Following the speeches an almost unbelievable supply of freshly cooked meats and aromatic savouries kept arriving at our table, followed by authentic eastern sweets and exotic fruits.

My most interesting table companion at the meal was a Hafiz or Memoriser. This is someone who has meticulously committed to memory all the 114 chapters of the Qu'an (Koran) which actually amounts to 6348 verses. This task needs to be started at an early age when the mind is still receptive. In his case he had mastered it by the time he had reached thirteen.

What devout people, and what an amazing evening! I saw and heard nothing that was at variance with my own Christian beliefs. Love all and hate none, surely encapsulates everything.

I do hope I will be invited again, and peace and blessings on them all.



## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY:**

**Sunday 14th June at 6.30pm**

*An Evening with Lawrence Freeman at the Sacred Heart Church  
25 Between Streets, Cobham, KT11 1AA*

Lawrence Freeman, a leading exponent of inter-faith meditation will speak on “*What on Earth does ‘spirit’ mean?*”. There will be a charge of £10 per head for this event, and those wishing to go need to reserve a place with Jackie Foster on 01932 864249, (mobile)07860 588567 or email jackie@fosterja.org.uk.

**Tuesday 7th July**

**Annual General Meeting, Civic Centre, Esher at 7 for 7.30pm**

The Meeting will be attended by the Mayor and followed by refreshments and an opportunity to discuss the EMF programme.

**Tuesday 18th August at 7pm**

**‘Iraq before and after the invasion’**

A talk by Gail Partridge at Church Gate House, Downside Bridge Road, Cobham, KT11 3EJ. This talk by Gail will include slides taken during her visits



### **Please note. . .**

Where relevant please let Geoff Morris (01932 868454) know if you are attending any event so that we can get the numbers right for catering. Unless otherwise stated there will be no charge for events but donations will be gratefully received and can now, of course, be gift-aided.

**Visit to *The Coptic Orthodox Centre, Stevenage* on 28th March, 2009**

It is hoped to include an article on this visit in the next Newsletter



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*The site contains back copies of our Newsletter with articles summarising the tenets of the major faiths of the world.*

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**Publisher:** Edna Tipping

**Printed by:** Impress Print Services Ltd

[www.impressprint.net](http://www.impressprint.net)