

Elmbridge Multi-faith Forum

Registered Charity No. 1122962

NEWSLETTER

Summer 2015 - Spring 2016

Issue 20

This publication is sponsored by Elmbridge Borough Council

Since our last Newsletter we have . . .

- Published and distributed in March 2015 our 19th Newsletter
- Finalised our report on the visit to the Church of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) in Thames Ditton
- Attended the launch of the Surrey Muslim Association at the Shah Jehan Mosque on 3rd June
- On Tuesday 28th July held our Annual General Meeting in the EMF Centre, followed by a talk and discussion led by Dr Nabil Mustapha on 'Faith and Democracy'
- On 29th September held a debate at Church Gate House Cobham on 'To what extent if any and how, should Freedom of Speech/Expression be limited?'
- Held our Annual Gala on Saturday 28th November in the Joyce Grenfell Centre, Claremont Fan Court School
- Dissolved the Walton 'Street Angels' scheme, because it had solved the problem for which it was established
- Were represented by three of our members at the 800th Anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta
- Held meetings with the Chaplain and staff of the Princess Alice Hospice in Esher
- On 24th February 2016, visited the Armenian Orthodox Church of St Sarkis in Iverna Gardens, Kensington
- Continued to meet the demand for our '*Insights into Faiths*' booklets and to work on an expanded version in one volume
- Continued our research into introduction and inclusion of newcomers to Elmbridge who do not speak English and come from other faiths and cultures
- Been represented on the Independent Advisory Group to Surrey Police, Brooklands Radio, Voluntary Action Elmbridge (VAE), Elmbridge Equality & Diversity Forum, Elmbridge Community & Safety Partnership (EC & SP) and SACRE

Our work during this period has been supported by a grant of £750 from Elmbridge Borough Council

As reported in our last Newsletter, the visit below took place on 27th January 2015, but we were unable to 'clear' our report before the Newsletter was published.

Visit to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

Thames Ditton, Surrey on Tuesday 27th January 2015

Introduction

With the help and good offices of Mr John Dolman, arrangements were made for EMF members to make a group visit to that church, which is within Elmbridge.

We were welcomed by Bishop Jonathan Nabrotsky and his team into the wood panelled hall with hardly any icons or artefacts. There is no cross in the church. The reason we were told, is the belief that Christ did not die. He is alive. There are no images of Christ although there are some pictures of Him.

John Dolman then gave a brief welcome talk in which he hoped that, despite the differences in interpretation of the Gospel by the different religions, there would be a spirit of unity in this evenings proceedings.

There is one God, He may be called Elohim or Allah or any other name, but His is inevitably a sacred name, as in "Hallowed be Thy name." John then mentioned some teachings by the Buddhist ShinjoEto who taught us that we could have a good life, a good religion and material wealth, but most important was to feel good. A good way to feel like that is to heed the 'Beatitudes' of the Bible, where blessings are promised to the poor, the meek and so on. Indeed this shows how the teachings of Buddhism and Christianity are so very similar.

John asked that in listening to the presentation we should all look to those areas of commonality between our different religions.

A song by 12 year old Karmin Jones

Following this introduction we were treated to the angelic voice of Karmin accompanied by her mother on the piano. The sweetness of the voice and the uplifting melody of the song was a source of great joy. The applause was enthusiastic, and we thanked Karmin and her mother for coming from their home purposely to so lovingly entertain us.

More about the church

During Jesus Christ's ministry He established His church on Earth. From Paul's epistles, it is clear that within a few years of Christ's crucifixion the churches in different cities were straying from His teaching. As we know, His Apostles were accused and put to death in violent ways, and it is our belief that consequently the Lord God removed His Priesthood

Authority from Earth. Thus began what we term the Great Apostasy. We believe that the confused nature of God as described in the Nicene Creed, is a result of there being no divine inspiration for the council.

The young Joseph Smith was as confused as any as to which religion he should follow, and one day he came across James 1:5 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him'. He prayed for guidance, and In answer to his sincere prayer, the Lord God and His Son Jesus Christ appeared to the young Joseph Smith, and subsequent angelic visitations and teaching led to the publication of *The Book of Mormon*.

Joseph Smith was further told that he was to re-establish Christ's church on Earth, and the first meeting of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was held on 6th April 1830. Joseph Smith continued to receive Heavenly guidance in his role as a modern day prophet. Throughout his life he suffered persecution, and finally he sealed his testimony of the truth of his teaching with his own blood when he was murdered by a mob in Carthage, Illinois on 27th June 1844.

Following the death of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young was elected as President and Prophet of the church. As in the days of Christ, the President is supported by a quorum of twelve Apostles who are special witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ. But there is ever only one Prophet of the church. Priesthood can only be held by men, but women are very active in the structure and activities of the church through their Relief Society.

The church now has some 15 million members, and there are about 90,000 missionaries worldwide sharing the Gospel. All members of the church undertake their duties on a voluntary basis; to be called to a serving in the church is a source of joy. We were introduced to the Mission President, Mr Millar, a venerable man, quiet and obviously with dignity and pleasant demeanour. He advised us that it is the duty of every male member over the age of 18 to do two years of full time missionary work. For females, although they are very welcome to serve a mission, it is not considered their duty.

Order of the Congregational Mass

Attendance at church on a Sunday lasts from 10am to 1pm. The first hour of the Sunday service is termed the Sacrament Meeting. All attend to sing hymns, to worship and to take the Sacrament; because of the belief that alcohol should not be consumed the Sacrament consists of bread and consecrated water. During the second hour the children separate to their own classrooms and the men and women remain together – all are taught the Gospel Doctrines or Bible Studies. Then, for the third hour the men and women separate with the men being taught appropriate to their Priesthood and the women are taught in their Relief Society. In addition the church organises Home Teaching programmes for the Priesthood holders and Visiting Teaching for Relief Society members.

Financing

Every member of the church has the obligation to contribute a tithe of 10% of their earnings. In addition, once a month every member is asked to fast for two meals and to make a generous offering of the cost saved by this fast.

Divine Ordainment of the Family

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints are allowed only one wife, and the concept of polygamy was abolished by the Church in 1890; the family is ordained of God and marriage is between a man and a woman. Chastity before marriage is imperative and children are seen as a gift of God (Psalm 27:3)

Members of the church abstain from all consumption of alcoholic beverages and tea and coffee; the teaching is to avoid anything that can be habit forming. Paul, in his epistles, teaches that our bodies are the temple of God, that the Holy Spirit can live there should it be 'clean'.

Mr Derek White (High Priest)

Our second session was led by Mr Derek White, who told us that he is eighth generation Mormon. He described how the church carries the name of Jesus Christ because it is the restored church that He founded – He is the Creator and the Lord of the Old Testament. The church accepts four books of scripture termed the Standard Works: the Holy Bible (King James version), the Book of Mormon (another testament of Jesus Christ), the Doctrine and Covenants (modern day revelation to the Prophet) and the Pearl of Great Price (additional translation and revelation by the Prophet Joseph Smith.)

Jesus Christ existed before the world was formed as we all were, but in a spiritual form, living with our Father in Heaven. God wanted us to experience good and evil and all that a physical body brings, but He knew that none would entirely reject the temptations of evil. He needed a plan to allow men to return to Him in a pure state, so He called on His 'sons of the morning' for volunteers to achieve this. Lucifer proposed that man should never be allowed to sin so they could all return to Heaven, and Lucifer would be glorified for this achievement. But God the Father required that all His children should be allowed to choose their actions of their own free will. Jesus proposed that He could be a sinless sacrifice for man's transgressions, thus allowing them to return to their Father in Heaven and the Glory would be to God.

Jesus and God created the Earth and Satan was banished here to tempt man. Subsequently, through the Holy Spirit, Mary was pregnant with Jesus as an incarnation of God on Earth; thus is Jesus both the son of Mary and the son of God.

We know through the Bible of Jesus's three years of ministry and His establishment of His church and of His twelve Apostles. We read, that in the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed to His Father and was able to carry all the sins of the world on His shoulders in His Atonement to God for us. That He was nailed to the cross on which He 'gave up the

ghost'. That He overcame death by taking back his spirit in His resurrection, and thus we will all be able to return to live with our Father in Heaven.

We can read in Corinthians that our level of glory in the afterlife will depend upon our lives here on Earth, it being described as 'the Glory of the sun, the moon and the stars'. In answer to a question, Mr White told that immediately upon death our spirit departs our physical body, either to 'paradise' or to 'spirit prison' (similar to the Jewish concept of Sheoul). That those in paradise teach those in prison so that all may hear the Gospel and all may repent of their sins.

The Book of Mormon - presented by our Missionary Elders

It is said that The Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion – if it is true then Joseph Smith was truly a Prophet of God, and ours is indeed the restored Church of Jesus Christ. The book tells the history of a group of people living in Jerusalem in 600BC who were commanded by God to leave the city and follow wherever He would lead them. Their travel took them eventually to the Americas, and the book tells of what became of their descendants. During their travels the people were commanded to make a record on gold and brass plates of what befell them. In due course, through war and bitter fighting these people were annihilated, but God commanded that the plates be buried in order that their history would be available to later generations.

Joseph Smith, by Divine Guidance, was able to locate these plates, and he was ordered by an angel to translate them into English through the agency of the Urim and Thummim (Deut 33:8).

Family History and Temples - presented by our Sister Missionaries

In the very last two verses of the Old Testament Malachi tells us that the Lord will send Elijah to us before the 'great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers,' These verses tell us of the sacred nature of the family and how we can continue to live with our families in the Celestial Kingdom with our Lord God. However we cannot enter the Kingdom of God unless we have repented of our sins and been washed clean in the waters of Baptism. But for many of God's children, through no fault of their own, they have never heard of the Gospel nor met a person with the Priesthood Authority to baptise them. Hence we read in the Bible of baptism for the dead, and this ordinance is conducted in the Temple for those spirits in Spirit Prison who have accepted Christ's teaching. For this reason family history is of major importance in Mormon families, since we may only conduct these baptisms for our own past relatives.

For our children Baptism is only conducted for those who are eight years old or older. The Lord has advised that children under eight years of age do not fully understand the concept of sin and so are regarded as sinless. For those over eight years of age Baptism is therefore a conscious decision. In the Temple we also make solemn vows and make covenants with Our Lord God.

Bishop Nabrotsky spoke briefly to close our presentation, and told how exciting it is to have a Prophet of the Lord in our time to lead and guide us in the paths of righteousness. Then we were invited to socialise with fellow Mormons and to partake of a delightful buffet.

We thanked all those who had entertained us with a wonderful evening of knowledge and spirituality, and we agreed to consider an invitation to the London Temple Visitor Centre at some time in the future.

Nabil M Mustapha (Revised & Edited by Mr John Dorman)



*Launch of the Surrey Muslim Association
at the Shah Jehan Mosque, Woking
Wednesday 3rd June*

The sun was shining brightly on this delightful summer's afternoon when guests started to arrive in the attractive grounds of Shah Jahan Mosque in Woking to attend the Surrey Muslim Association (SMA) Launch Event. This was the first ever public event hosted by the SMA since its inauguration on 12th December 2013. The aim of this organisation is to represent Muslims of Surrey and bring together scattered resources for the betterment of Muslims in Surrey and the wider communities.

It was a great pleasure and honour for SMA to welcome the respected members from a wide cross-section of our society to this special event. The guests included the honourable guest speaker the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey Dame Sarah Goad; MP Jonathan Lord; Chair of Surrey County Council Sally Marks; Chief Constable Lynn Owens; Chief Superintendent John Cox; Chief Executive of Woking Borough Council Ray Morgan; Police and Crime Commissioner Kevin Hurley; and a number of faith representatives from various faith groups. Nabil Mustapha, Geoffrey Morris and Chuyuen Corfield represented Elmbridge Multifaith Forum.

Imam Hashmi commenced the day with a prayer and welcomed all the distinguished guests warm-heartedly on behalf of the SMA, followed by the chair person Dr Naqvi's introductory talk in which he emphasised that Islam is a religion of peace and unity, and how SMA is endeavouring to display and restore this true image of Islam by removing misconceptions and reaching out to the wider community.

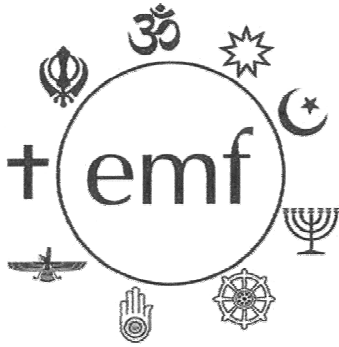
A very informative talk about '*Presentation of Muslims in Surrey*' was then delivered by our Faith Link Adviser Kauser Akhtar, who informed her captivated audience the statistics regarding the Muslim population in Surrey, and about new projects like Noah's ark that is helping to co-ordinate social, charitable, religious and educational projects in the local community, currently housed at the Ashford & Staines Community Centre. She also summarised how other mosques and Islamic centres like Shah Jahan Mosque and Al-Asr Education and Community Centre in Woking area are providing several community, educational, health and sport activities and services. She reminded the audience that Muslims are taught to consider the diversity of the world as a sign of God's Mercy and an opportunity to rise above racism and conceit.

The audience were then taken on a virtual trip to Prophet Mohammad's (Peace be upon him) city Madinah, through a very sweet song full of loving memories of this city sung by young Amaniya Najib, who is a student of Winston Churchill School and the Shah Jahan Mosque.

It was the time for the guest speaker Dame Sarah Goad to mesmerise the audience with her superbly delivered message of peace, unity and interfaith relationship. She pointed out that Muslims, Christians and Jews share Prophet Abraham (Peace be upon him) as our common ancestor. Dame Sarah Goad also shared her experience when she read the translation of the Holy Quran and found it to be a book written with supreme excellence, and delivering the same message of 'oneness of God' and 'mercy and forgiveness' as delivered by the Bible and Torah. She finished her captivating speech by reciting verses from Lord Tennyson's famous verses "*More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of*".

Young Amaniya once again took the stage singing a melodious Punjabi nasheed (religious song) using percussion instruments, and representing a vast majority of our talented, multi- linguistic Muslim youth.

To round off the afternoon, Brother Arshad Gamiet of the Islamic Welfare Association, West Surrey, delivered an enchanting talk titled *British Muslims: helping to build a better Britain*. He gave several fascinating references from the Quran and the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him) regarding promoting respect and tolerance, saying ' . . . our human diversity is a divine gift and we should not fear diversity. Race, religion and culture should not stop us from promoting good and preventing evil . . . we must work together to make Britain even better'. With a final note of gratitude from the organisers the event came to a close. By this time the enticing aroma of the delicious spread of food had engulfed the whole atmosphere, and so a perfect day ended in a perfect manner as all the guests and SMA members mingled with each other while enjoying their lunch and making new friends.



Tuesday 28th July Annual General Meeting in the EMF Centre

The Worshipful the Mayor of Elmbridge, Councillor Jan Fuller and escort Mr John Caton

Executive Committee Members

Nabil Mustapha (*Chairman and Trustee*)
Geoff Morris (*Secretary and Trustee*)
Leonard Beighton (*Treasurer and Trustee*)
Rashid Laher (*Trustee*)
Chuyen Corfield
Kauser Akhtar
Michael Banks
Derrick Halle
Margaret Hicks
Nazir Malik

Members and Friends

Debbie Banks
Ron & Thelma Batchelor
Chris & Anne Beales
David Dane
Michael Elson
Stella Eusebio
Chris Frost (Epsom & Ewell)
Derek & Mary Hilbourne
Tony & Mina McCaffery
Shiraz Mirza
John Molloy
Simon Mortimore (Epsom)
John Padwick (Epsom)

Members and Friends contd . . .

Gail Partridge
David & Judy Porter
Lindsey Sainsbury
Lynne Scholefield (Epsom)
Ingrid Scott
Mirza Shiraz
John & Sheila Stephens
Rosalenne Sutherland-Waite
Alan Thomas
Nadim Vanderman

Apologies

Fenella Bennets
Stefan Collier
Jackie Foster
Barry Judd
Revd. Dr Satkunanayagam
Anthony Sheppard

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

While I shall leave the details of our activities for my friend Geoff Morris, our Honorary Secretary, I can mention a few events that I personally feel proud of.

The first is the response of many of our members to the invitation to the inauguration of the Surrey Muslim Association, an event that was honoured by the presence of the Lord Lieutenant Dame Sarah Goad, Surrey Chief Constable Lynne Owens and others. It was a grand inauguration at the Woking Mosque, very much in the spirit of interfaith dialogue and understanding. An added personal privilege, and something I can truly boast of, is that the attendants were presented with a translation of a document despatched by no less than the Prophet Mohammed PBUH, titled "*A Charter of Privileges to the Christians*". The original of this document I had the great honour to have seen, as it is deposited at St Catherine's Greek Orthodox Monastery in Sinai, Egypt, a monastery I had visited many years ago.

The second event that I am proud to mention, is the celebration of the 800th Anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta. That was attended by HM The Queen, HRH Prince Phillip and The Duke of Cambridge. Well, at least three of our members were among the invitees.

A third event to which one of our members is invited annually, and which is honoured by the attendance of The Prince of Wales, is the annual remembrance day at Fromel in France for the Australians who fell in World War I and especially in Gallipoli.

While the reasons for these invitations, which are very personal, will vary, there is no doubt that this just shows the standing of our members in our society.

Well, I think I should stop boasting now and allow our Secretary to show you the real work we are happy to have done during the year.

It remains for me to thank you all and to beg that you continue your support to us, most essentially by participating and engaging with us. We remain grateful to Elmbridge Borough Council for their annual grant to EMF, and we hope that we put it to good causes that benefit our Elmbridge community.

Nabil M Mustapha

SECRETARY'S REPORT

During the past year we enjoyed visits to the Coptic Centre and Cathedral at Stevenage; the Ismaili Centre in South Kensington; the Shinyo-en Open Day and Light Floating Festival; the Sikh Gurdwara in Southall and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints in Thames Ditton (the Mormons). We also held our AGM at the Esher Hospice, our Annual Gala at Claremont School, and hosted or took part in Presentations and Discussions on '*Aspects of Buddhism*' and '*The Significance of Abraham/Ibrahim to Jews, Christians and Muslims*'.

Details of these activities are in Newsletter 19, copies of which are available for those of you who have not already received them.

Betty Sear, who has been a very active member of the Executive Committee, sadly decided to resign because of her declining health. Wendy Hoy's health and Kim Plumpton's exceptional work-load have limited their attendance at meetings. We thank all three of these ladies for all they have done in the past and hope that Kim and Wendy will shortly emerge from their problems.

The good news is that Betty suggested Kate Shaw as her replacement from the Quaker Community, and we managed to persuade Michael Banks to allow us to co-opt him. These two new members promptly took a leading role in organising our '*Act of Unity in Memory of the Executed British Hostages*'. This was a very moving 'community event'.

The AGM will be followed by a presentation and discussion following the precedent that we set last year. We are in the process of trying to organise another visit to the Zoroastrian Centre. On Tuesday 22 September in Churchgate House, Cobham, we shall hold a multifaith discussion on '*Freedom of Speech*' (see page 20), and this year's Gala will be at the Joyce Grenfell Centre at Claremont Fan Court School on Saturday, 21st November (see page 22).

Our problem is to find more help with administration and organisation. If you can give us some time please let us know or join the Committee.

We are ever thankful to the Borough of Elmbridge for continuing support and also thank our very loyal and hard-working committee members. Special thanks go to Edna Tipping who has somehow found time to prepare the Newsletter for printing, and to David Robinson who has faithfully updated our Website.

Geoff Morris

TREASURER'S REPORT

Overall this year we made a deficit of £712. This was wholly due to the Gala on which our deficit was a very disappointing £905.

Last year we made a small surplus on the Gala, but ordinarily we expect to make a small deficit, which (recognising its value to us and to the community as a showcase) we are able to meet by our membership fees and other activities. Clearly our Gala team are well aware of this and are taking it fully into account in planning for the next Gala on 28th November.

Claremont Fan School very generously make their Hall available to us free of charge, but clearly we have to pay for the food and the time of the staff: this was rather higher than previously and we may well have to allow for that in the future. We also have to pay the expenses, and in some cases fees for the entertainers, though some of the latter donate the fees back. However, we also saw a very considerable drop in the donations for the Gala, and we shall need to consider eg though better publicity, how we can best restore these at least to their previous level.

Among other matters to which I should draw attention in particular, was that we arranged more events than we did last year, so that the level of both donations for them and the cost of them was greater. Our community support included a donation of £50 to the Princess Alice Hospice where we held our AGM, and of £50 to the Havelock Road Gurdwara in Southall which we visited in September. The equipment cost of £95 was in respect of a loudspeaker.

As ever we should like to thank Elmbridge Borough Council very warmly for their continuing support.

Despite the deficit, we have £3,168 in the bank. This is a good base on which we can fund future activities.

I should also like to give my personal thanks to Nadim Vanderman for his work on certifying our accounts.

Leonard Beighton

ADOPTION OF ACCOUNTS AND APPOINTMENT OF EXAMINER

The examined accounts were unanimously adopted, and the meeting expressed thanks to the examiner, Mr. Nadim Vanderman ACMA who agreed to be the examiner for the coming year.

The accounts can be viewed on the EMF website at : www.elmbridgemultifaith.org.uk

ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

The following were unanimously elected:

Dr Nabil Mustapha (Baha'i)	... Chairman, Trustee
Mr Geoff Morris (Christian)	... Secretary/Newsletter, Trustee
Mr Leonard Beighton (Anglican)	... Treasurer, Trustee
Mrs Phyllis Woodhead (Christian Scientist)	... Membership
Major Rashid Laher (Muslim)	... Trustee
Mrs Kauser Ahktar (Muslim)	
Mrs Chuyuen Corfield (Buddhist)	
Mrs Jackie Foster (Roman Catholic)	
Mrs Pushpa Patel (Hindu)	
Mr Derick Halle (Jewish Reform)	
Mrs Margaret Hicks (Christian)	
Revd Wendy Hoy (Interfaith)	
Mr Nazir Ahmad Malik (Ahmadiyya Muslim)	
The Revd Kim Plumpton (United Reformed Church)	
Mr Michael Banks (Anglican)	
Ms Kate Shaw (Society of Friends)	

REFRESHMENTS AND SOCIALISING

The guests were invited to a buffet spread of food and soft drinks, and they found this also an opportunity to discuss and chat and get to know each other. Interestingly, there was a group of visitors from Epsom including the Mayor of Epsom (attending unofficially), and they were drawing ideas to assist them in setting up their own Inter-Faith forum in Epsom.

CLOSING REMARKS BY THE MAYOR

After a discussion led by our Chairman, the Mayor Councillor Jan Fuller, expressed her appreciation of the work of EMF and her hope that Elmbridge would continue to support its activities.

Tuesday, 28th July - talk and discussion led by Dr Nabil Mustapha on 'Faith and Democracy'

Introduction:

Democracy is one of the most commonly used words in every lexicon and language. Whenever people talk of democracy or the democratic process, they probably refer to their own specific understanding of the term, and so democracy carries as many meanings as there are people or systems in the world. We hear of the Christian democrats, the Islamic democracy, the Zimbabwean democratic party of the likes of Robert Mugabe, and we knew of Uganda's very democratic Eidy Amin.

Of course, by contrast, we have just celebrated the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta by King John, relinquishing his absolute right to rule and accepting the rule of the representatives of the people. Human rights, Habeas Corpus and other benefits to the ordinary people followed, and we are still enjoying the aptly called "Mother of Parliaments" of Westminster in full function.

So, let me start again. What is "Democracy"? The dictionary defines democracy as (a:) "government by the people; especially rule of the majority" (b:) "a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly, through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections".

The word democracy comes from the Greek, *dēmokratía*, "rule of the people": *dēmos* meaning "people" and *krátos* meaning "power" or "rule". In the 5th century BC, the word was meant to denote the political systems then existing in Greek city-states, notably Athens; such as the assembly of people, the rule of two kings (Diarchy), and the respect for education regardless of wealth. The term *democratia* was indeed antonym to (or the opposite of) *aristokratía*, meaning the "rule of an elite".

The dawn of the democracy:

This is not the earliest glimpses of democracy. Indeed, in ancient Egypt the Pharaoh Akhnaten and his (quite influential) wife, "Neffertiti", was described varyingly as "God/king/a product of the sun (which was itself synonymous with God)" and so on. Akhnaten was probably the first to introduce the concept of "monotheism". He was first to use the expression "The Glory of God". He was also said to be good to his vassals, regardless of whether they hailed from Egypt or from Canaan or Syria. He may have been a king cum prophet as distinct from the other Pharaohs.

But we cannot mention ancient Egypt without mentioning Joseph, Son of Jacob, whose legendary wisdom and correct interpretation of the Pharaoh's dream made him the Grand Vizier of the Pharaoh's palace. He demonstrated equitability and fairness when the famine struck, and ensured that the stored grain was to be distributed to the people, even those from outside Egypt, and they happened to include his own brethren.

Apart from this biblical story of Joseph (substantiated in a salient way in the Qur'an), we have some indication of democracy in the Judaic era, where the kings were also supposed to be imbued with spiritual authority, allowing them to assume a combined spiritual and temporal leadership and rule. There was a continual dialogue between the kings and the people. The illustrious eras of David and then Solomon are testament to an orderly rule of law as well as wisdom, but not democracy in the sense that we understand it.

However, an example of democracy can be glimpsed in this quote from 2 Kings: *"For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king: yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table. What right therefore have I yet to cry any more unto the king? And the king said unto him, Why speakest thou any more of thy matters?"*

Another example of the sort of power struggle in those days is witnessed thus: *"And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more right in David than ye: why then did ye despise us, that our advice should not be first had in bringing back our king? And the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel."*

A rather sad and sinister example of "democracy" is demonstrated by the leadership of the Jews when dealing with Jesus Christ, and we note:

"And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate".

It is difficult to find a real example of democracy as we know it in that time period, and we actually had to wait for the ancient Greeks to work out a system some centuries later.

The Greek Democracy:

Around the 6th century BCE there were, as mentioned, the city states or "Polies". Athens and Sparta were the two salient ones. Sparta was ruled by an oligarchy (rule by the few elite). There was a semblance of democracy in that there was the "Diarchy" (two kings) and two counsels, one of the "Elders" and one of the "Spartans". Their system of education for all, and all people being equal, was admired by the likes of Herodotus, Plato, Aristotle and others. Their women enjoyed every kind of "luxury and intemperance", and there was some public ownership and elementary rights of inheritance.

However, the Greek and Spartan war with the Persians debilitated these societies and, as we see nowadays, when countries become debilitated, autocracies and oppressive oligarchies take hold, and this certainly happened in ancient Greece at the time.

In the 5th century BC Cleisthenes, a venerable Greek sage, recognised as "the father of Athenian democracy" reformed the political systems of government mentioned before.

He had to deal with the aftermath of the tyranny of the years 508-507 BCE, which occurred because of the existing family-loyalty based political system. He created instead the popular, political type of organisation based on the so-called "Ecclesia" or assembly of people.

It then fell to Aristotle and Plato to analyse these ideologies and categorise them into the three systems: the rule of the few, (Oligarchy/Aristocracy). Total (single person) Autocracy or Monarchy, and the rule of the many (Democracy/Polity).

A little later, around 486 BCE, Plato, in his dialogue "The Republic" made reference to spirituality, and monotheism, and this appears to be the influence of Socrates who is known to have travelled to Palestine and Syria and to have acquired insight into the concept of the single divine source adding a spiritual dimension to physical creation. Plato decreed that Justice is a factor of the integrity of our faculties, wherein each capacity functions as it is ordained to.

This evolution created the system whereby the rulers take the decisions, the military are entrusted to protect the state, the poets' role was to communicate with the masses. To tidy all this up we have the craftsmen, farmers and shopkeepers to provide the remaining services. We here witness the beginnings of convergence of "spirituality" with a "democracy" of distinct roles. Substantial rights were conferred by the aristocrats on to the plebeians

The dawn of Roman Democracy:

These developments in Greece did not pass unnoticed by Rome. They had the rule of a king, but were subjected to external threats and the last king was deposed in 510 BCE by a group of aristocrats led by Lucius Junius Brutus. There followed a conflict between the ruling families (so-called Patricians) and the rest of the population, the so-called Plebeians. A commission was set up and an assembly of 10 people (the Decemviri) was formed, and some laws were transposed from Greece and formulated into "Twelve Tablets", recognising certain rights. By the 4th. Century BCE, the plebs were given the right to stand for consulship and other major offices of state. A Senate embodied the aristocrats and assemblies of the people were formed.

The Middle East:

This leads us to next big event appearing in the Middle east, of course, Christianity. No wonder that Jesus' message was meticulous in veering as far away from politics and desire for any form of rule. His was not to be a clash with the Romans running that region. His rebuke to the Jews when He told them to give unto Caesar what is unto Caesar was a careful and, in our current jargon, politically correct advice. The people of Israel wanted a king to deliver them from the occupying Romans. Jesus was not going to oblige.

His message was mostly spiritual and aimed at regulating the individual's relationship with God on the one hand, and on the other hand simultaneously, drumming all the

values to be established in a society of love and harmony. If the Ten Commandments were laws in tablets of stone, the beatitudes were the sermons for the human soul.

The Far East:

During the few centuries that preceded the appearance of Jesus in Palestine, we had several important religions appearing in the Far East, notably Sri Krishna in India and Gautama Buddha in Nepal. It is difficult to find evidence of any set of teachings that would point to a democratic process or set of teachings in those religions. They gained widespread followings in India, Indo China, China and Japan, and other parts of that world which had insignificant interaction with the Middle East and Europe, let alone the Americas or Africa.

The Bhagavad-Gita, part of the Mahabharata, and a "smirti" text that is a "memorised tradition", suggests the following Yogas to reach God: Knowledge, Devotion, Meditation, and Karma. Karma Yoga is pure selfless service. But the Bhagavad-Gita also contains the narrative between the warrior Prince Arjuna and his co-charioteer and "mentor" Krishna, in which the latter assuages the fears of the former who, if engaged in the oncoming (Righteous) battle, is bound to kill his kith and kin. The dialogue contained in twelve sections, is full of wisdom and ends by avoiding any war.

However, in the Hindu tradition, political rule is grounded in the divine cosmos but differentiated from spiritual functions, as set forth in the Law Code of Manu and in Kautilya's Arthashastra, both dating back to the first four centuries, B.C.

There are four very important characteristics of Hinduism related to democracy: pluralism (and thus no central authority structure), tolerance (which also follows from pluralism), the caste system, and the inherent separation of politics and religion. The caste system defines people as unequal from birth and throughout life, and there is nothing the individual can do to break out of his caste in this lifetime.

Thus, we note that the Indian Civilisation was based on sporadic "fiefdoms", each operating within the overall principles of tolerance and pluralism. These may be the only recognisable concepts of "Democracy" within these settings.

Similarly, it is difficult to identify any recognisable "Democracy" in Buddhism. The Buddha did not put himself above others, and so in Buddhism every person has to reach his aim, the aim of "enlightenment". Most importantly, that aim is to reduce or eliminate suffering. But to achieve this adequately one needs the "teacher", who is thus important, but only to be respected, not revered.

By the time Buddhism reached China there had already been another great movement, some calling it religion: Confucianism. Confucianism is the mixture of the spiritual and social teachings with novel aspects such as revering the family and ancestry. It enshrined Righteousness, relinquishing self interest, and the concepts of "reciprocity" and the "Golden Rule" (Do not do to others what you do not wish done to you). Government was deemed best when it relied on people's morality, not punishment or coercion. The

semblance of "Democracy" was in the establishment of three families from the aristocracy, constituting three Ministries: Minister over the masses (De facto Prime Minister), Minister of Works and the Minister of war. It appears that Confucianism managed to create a sort of "Centripetal" system of two-way authority and communication between the "Provinces" and the Central ruling aristocracy, best understood as a "Wheel hub and spokes".

The concept of "Shura":

We can thus see that we had to wait until the 6th century AD for Islam to introduce a concept of "Democracy" within the texts of the Qur'an. In this case, democracy is based on the principle of "Counsel", better known as "Shura". A whole chapter (or Sura) of the Qur'an is dedicated to Counsel, and in the Sura of the "Cow", it is stipulated that Shura should be the order even within the family, and even in everyday matters: *"The duty of feeding and clothing nursing mothers in a seemly manner is upon the father of the child . . . If they desire to wean the child by mutual consent and (after) consultation . . . "*

And in the Sura of Counsel we read: *"And those who answer the call of their Lord and establish worship, and whose affairs are a matter of counsel, and who spend of what We have bestowed upon them, and those who, when great wrong is done to them, defend themselves"*

So faith and democracy really only start to converge in Islam, but even there, details are difficult to find. The traditional manner of conduct of state or similar communal or tribal affairs relied on the "Majlis Al Shura", or Consultative Assembly, where the head or heads entertained members of the people to resolve issues or consult on their affairs. Even these days, several Islamic countries have a Majlis Al Shura as a higher House of Parliament.

However, it is important to mention that the concept of shura is not necessarily consultation with all people, but rather, most commonly with select representatives of the people, who are not necessarily elected.

Interestingly, echoes of this process are seen in Europe in the 9th century onwards, in such early developed nations as Sweden, Iceland, Germany, Ireland and, and most significantly, the Isle of Man, where Tynwald is the oldest continuous Parliament in the world. It began in 979 AD, but its roots go further back to the late 9th century. Tynwald was also the first place to offer universal suffrage in 1893.

I say echoes of Islam because these developments happened when Islam was established in Southern Europe, especially Cordoba, which was a Caliphate since the 8th century AD. The effects of that part of Islamic Spain on the rest of Europe is well known. However, it took another nearly 300 years for the Magna Carta to be signed and sealed in 1215, and we have just celebrated the 800th anniversary of this document that curtailed the powers of the King and gave the authority to the "Representatives of the People".

Even then the British Parliament, accepted as the "Mother of Parliaments", was established only in 1704, and it wasn't until the late 19th Century that there was a more widespread franchise for men. Women, however, had to wait until 1912 before they could have any voting rights.

Contemporary Democracy:

It is interesting to note that the concept of "Party Politics" is a rather novel one. The early members of the British parliament were called the Whigs or Tory. There was no "Labour Party". That only formed at the height of the industrial revolution when the interests of the workmen had to be addressed in some way.

Similar developments occurred in other European countries, although these were punctuated with serious episodes of authoritarian rule. The USA developed its own party system, or rather an evolution of systems that culminated into the existing system of two main parties: the Democratic and the Republican or GOP (which stands for "Grand Old Party"). It is interesting to note that the founding fathers were not in favour of political parties and George Washington, the first President of the USA, was not affiliated to any party. They feared that political parties would lead to conflict and stagnation.

In both the USA and Britain, the place of faith within political parties has been carefully nuanced and never directly involved. It is easy to see how these party political arrangements have led to confrontational, combative relationships, with opposition sometimes existing for opposition's sake rather than constructive engagement. Government policies are often aimed at remaining in power as much as they are for the public good. Moreover, while it is clear that Political Parties have to rely on finance from members, they also tap into resources with obvious vested interests. Payback time is an ever-present hazard. More importantly, unity is severely compromised and harmony or consensus is difficult to achieve.

The recently published book titled *More Human* by Steve Hilton, who was Senior Advisor to Prime Minister David Cameron until the last elections and is currently a professor at Stanford University, has expressed very strong opinions in this matter and suggests the need for radical changes in the quality of representation, particularly in the British Parliament.

Looking around the world, the place of religion in contemporary political systems ranged from the very severe adherence to total distancing. If faith and religion is to have a place in modern politics and democracy, it has first and foremost to avoid the influence of religious leaders who will always have entrenched positions and vested interests, and in the worst case scenario usurp religion to achieve power and authority.

I therefore wish to end this talk by a brief mention of the system of administration in the Bahá'í religion, first revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in 1863. In His teachings Bahá'u'lláh offers us an administrative order that totally eliminates party politics, and relies on free and secret ballot voting for assemblies of nine persons on local, national, and universal

levels. Every adult is eligible for voting or being elected. The voters rely on their judgement as to the qualities of those they choose, their wisdom, and their ability to serve. There is no electioneering and no permanent posts, because elections are annual at local and national levels and every five years at the universal level.

I mention this Bahá'í system as the latest instalment of Faith towards a democratic system that is actually working around the world. There are over 180 National Spiritual Assemblies around the world, and in the UK alone there is a National Spiritual Assembly as well as about 108 Local Spiritual Assemblies. This is a system that appears to work, and it is based on the spiritual as well as the pastoral and quasi political administration, relying on unity in outlook and interests rather than divisional factional ones.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I hope I have managed to use what limited time we have in picking the titbits of history that together may form a clear picture of the relationship between faith and democracy, and indeed how democracy as such has evolved along the ages. I hope I offered you a glimpse. There must be so much more to it.



Monday 29th September

Debate at Church Gate House Cobham on the topic:

*"What limits, if any, should be put on freedom of
Speech / expression and how?"*

Geoff Morris, who chaired the meeting, opened by saying that the topic was of considerable current interest and importance because:

1. 'Charlie Hebdo', a French weekly magazine had printed provocative cartoons depicting the Prophet, Mohamet. In consequence a group of gunmen had raided the premises of Charlie Hebdo, killing members of the staff. 'Holocaust Denial' is explicitly or implicitly illegal in several European countries.
2. There is some growth in both nationalist and Muslim extremism. Tensions have arisen between the supporters of the two sides.
3. At the time of the debate, the UK Government was considering bans on speeches by extremists.
4. Social media are being used to abuse children and other vulnerable members of society.

Geoff also pointed out that the means by which freedom of expression can be limited/regulated include:

- criminal or civil legislation
- public, governmental or other pressure
- the media

Presentations were then made by:

- an International Lawyer (Tara Taubman)
- a Humanist (Jenny Johnson)
- a Muslim Mufti (Zimmer Salihi)
- a Christian (Hugh Bryant who is also a British solicitor)

We had hoped to have a Jewish speaker, but unfortunately the date we chose was one of the main Jewish festivals which Jews spend with their families. However, the Jewish member of our EMF Committee told me that Holocaust Denial legislation was not seen as a priority for most UK Jews.

Tara Taubman

Born in Iran, Tara grew up in France where she qualified and practised as an avocat. After a spell in Germany she moved to the UK, gathering qualifications and writing articles on various aspects of international law. She explained that the basic principle behind 'Human Rights' was that any individual's rights were balanced by the need not to interfere unreasonably with the rights of other individuals. Thus, freedom of expression is balanced by the duty to respect the reputation and privacy of others.

She also pointed out that the French were particularly strong in their desire to protect democratic principles and rights, since many of these were first clearly stated by their eighteenth century philosophers and were at the heart of the Revolution of 1789. Since the Revolution, France has always insisted on being a secular state with powers clearly separated from religious involvement or interference. This explains much of the "Je suis Charlie" phenomenon. In the face of refugees, migration and terrorism, Marine Le Pen is offering a more credible and acceptable form of nationalism than her father.

Jenny Johnson

Jenny is a prominent British humanist. As such, she affirms the right of individuals to express their opinions provided that they do not unreasonably harm others or interfere with their human rights. An area of concern is the abuse of vulnerable members of society, such as children, the elderly, the infirm, members of minority ethnic or other groups. Traditional media (i.e. books, theatres, radio, films, television) can be regulated as to the honesty of information they present, and how and when they present it, but so-called 'social' media present new threats (grooming, harassment, bullying) are less easy to control.

Mufti Zimmer Salihi

Zimmer Salihi is a 'Mufti' i.e. 'Spiritual Islamic Leader and Law-giver' to Kosovar Muslims in the UK. He strongly made the point that the Qu'ran expressly forbids the taking of human life except in self-defence. There is no justification for acts of terrorism, nor is there any justification for a so-called Jihad against the European nations. 'Islam' is based on peace, freedom and submission not compulsion.

Hugh Bryant

Hugh is a Lay Reader in the Church of England and a Solicitor. Controls on the media are in a constant state of flux. Political correctness has removed once common expressions from use, whilst sexual, scatological and irreverent expressions are increasingly heard. What about the law of blasphemy? This has been a grey area in recent times. English law accepts that anyone should be free to express any reasonable view, whether or not it means questioning the existence of God or the Holocaust. What is not acceptable is a mode of expression that is deliberately calculated to offend or insult those who hold an opposing view.

Refreshments and discussion

During refreshments participants were asked to consider questions for the panel and topics for discussion. An interesting debate followed from which a measure of agreement emerged that:

1. On n'est pas Charlie, et on ne suit pas Charlie (The Chairman, being a linguist could not resist pointing out that, very exceptionally, the word 'suis' can mean either 'am' or 'follow'). A failing magazine had realised that it could increase its circulation by offending Muslims. When ISIL retaliated by attacking Charlie's staff in their offices, the circulation of the next issue achieved record numbers.
2. We hope that the Government's attempts to stop the spread of terrorist propaganda will not curb freedom of debate for students.
3. We hope that moderate Muslims will more strongly condemn acts of terrorism.

Saturday 28th November in the Joyce Grenfell Centre, Claremont Fan Court School - Annual Gala

The Gala is an opportunity for families of various faiths to come together to enjoy a variety of foods whilst being entertained by people, mainly young, of various cultures.

Guests of Honour were the Mayor of Elmbridge, Councillor Jan Fuller and her Escort, Mr John Cato, The Headmaster of the Senior School, Mr Jonathan Insole-Reed and his wife. They were welcomed by Nabil, who then handed over to Geoff Morris who acted as MC.

The participants were invited to fill their plates and glasses and return to the tables for the first part of the entertainment, which was provided by the dancers of the Kingston Chinese Association. We enjoyed the bright costumes and synchronised movements of the Junior Dance Troupe, followed by a Butterfly Dance by Danni Zhang. We then had a moving reading of Islamic Naats in Urdu and Arabic by Amaaniya Falak Nagib. In complete contrast, the first half of the programme ended with two very sensuous Latin-American dances, a Bachata and a Salsa, by Jose and Paola.

The interval gave everyone an opportunity to collect a variety of delicious desserts. The business of queuing for food is an excellent medium for causing people to talk to people whom they have never met before!!!

After the interval the entertainment continued with a Jewish Folk Group, and the Claygate Music-Hall Players who had us all 'singing along' in best Old Time Music Hall Style.

Nabil thanked all those who had made the evening such a success including, in particular, the Headmaster, the Bursar and all the staff of Claremont who had prepared all the food and the drinks. Particular thanks were also given to John-Paul, who had so efficiently stage managed the presentation of the various performers and their musical requirements. Thanks also to the performers who had given their time, and to the Committee of EMF who had worked so well together.

The evening was concluded by a few words of appreciation and congratulation by the Mayor, who had welcomed the opportunity to talk with so many different people and learn about the various communities within Elmbridge and the way they worked so well together.



The Mayor of Elmbridge with the dancers from Kingston Chinese Association

Wednesday 24th February 2016

*Visit to the Armenian Church of St Sarkis,
Iverna Gardens, Kensington*

Bishop Hovakim Manukyan, Primate of the Armenian Church in the UK, had originally invited us to visit the Armenian Church of St Yeghiche in Cranley Gardens on 21st September 2015. However, he was summoned to a rehearsal at Westminster Abbey for a State service on 28th September to commemorate the Armenian Massacre/Genocide, carried out by the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1918.

After much searching for convenient dates, on 24th February twenty nine of us left by coach at 10am from Mercer Close and arrived at 11am at Iverna Gardens, which were dominated by the small, tall, very square Church of St Sarkis. We were to learn that it had been built in 1922-23 by Calouste Gulbenkian, the oil millionaire and public benefactor who is buried in its grounds. The Church is in typical Armenian form with four pillars at the corners to represent the Gospel writers, who are the basis of the Church and hold it aloft.

We were welcomed by the Bishop and members of his clergy and congregation who explained that Christianity was brought to Armenia in the first Century of the Christian era, reputedly by Saint Bartholomew who is the patron Saint of Armenia. The Armenian Church has always remained independent, though it has close relations with, and many similarities to, the Coptic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches.



Armenia is a small republic in the highlands surrounding Mount Ararat, which is itself in Turkey. It has recently been reconstituted, having been a part of the USSR. It is now bordered by Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Iran, and is a tenth of its size in Christian times. During the First World War, the Ottoman Empire carried out three years of genocide in Armenia, resulting in the dispersion of many survivors, with small communities in a number of countries. Wherever it was decided to establish a church, the first step would be to establish a building in the same form as St Sarkis in London. The next step would be to establish a 'school' and community centre. In the case of London, this had been achieved by buying and converting the nearby former Anglican church of St Peter in Cranley Gardens and renaming it after St Yeghich.

We had a very enlightening presentation, many questions and much discussion, details of which we shall save for our next Newsletter, by which time we shall have checked that we heard aright. We were then invited for refreshments in the living quarters adjoining the Church and we left at 2pm as planned.

DISSOLUTION OF THE WALTON 'STREET ANGELS' SCHEME

The Street Angels have been a victim of their own success. At a board meeting of the Trustees held on Friday 19th June 2015, it was reported that the assessment of the police is that "the need in Walton has receded dramatically". The Trustees therefore decided to wind up the scheme. There have been many expressions of gratitude for the very valuable work done by the angels.



800TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIGNING OF MAGNA CARTA

Dr Nabil Mustapha, Margaret Hicks and Raschid Laher were invited to the official celebration at Runnymede to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta.

MEETINGS WITH THE CHAPLAIN AND STAFF OF THE ESHER HOSPICE

Revd Dr Steve Nolan, Chaplain to the Esher Hospice and a member of EMF, suggested that we might help the hospice to improve the care given to non-Christians. After a number of informal discussions, Steve was able to arrange for Michael Banks and Geoff Morris to meet a small group from the hospice on 16th September. This was followed by a further lunchtime meeting on 15th November, at which staff responsible for training were present. We are in the process of assessing needs and putting together a training day programme involving speakers from different religions.

FUTURE EVENTS

◆ Visit to the Zoroastrian Centre

We are in the process of fixing a date to visit the Zoroastrian Centre for Europe, which is situated in Harrow. Zoroastrianism was revealed over 1,000 BCE by Zoroaster(aka Zarathustra) and was the dominant religion of three Persian empires over the period 559 BCE to 227CE. The Magi who followed the star at the time of Christ's birth were almost certainly Zarathustrian astrologers. The Centre occupies a Grade 2 listed building which was a former music hall. As usual we shall hire a bus.

◆ Other plans in progress

Our hope is to run an 'event' (discussion, visit or project) every two months. Whilst continuing to visit sites of interest, we should like to explore themes like: How different religions deal with birth, marriage and death; Female Genital Mutilation; Sufism; Dervishes; Nonconformist Christian Churches.

MEMBERSHIP

*We very much regret to report the death of Phyllis Woodhead
who had been Membership Secretary since the foundation of EMF in 2004*

We currently have over 100 members but are always pleased to welcome new individuals to join us. 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.

For enquiries about membership,
please contact our Treasurer Leonard Beighton on 01932 863516

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Membership: We need to find a new Membership Secretary. In the meantime application forms can be obtained from either the Treasurer or the Secretary on the contact numbers above.

General correspondence should be addressed to:

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

