

HOW DO WE ORGANISE AN INTER FAITH WALK? PRACTICALITIES.

What follows is not a blue print – there's no one right way to do an inter faith walk – every locality is different and different people have different priorities. However, having organised, on behalf of the South London Inter Faith Group, fifteen annual walks around south London, I, along with other members of the South London Inter Faith Group, feel we have some useful experience to share! So this is how *we* do it!

I start with offering homage to **Brother Daniel Faivre**, the remarkable and much-loved pioneer of inter faith relations, who died in 2007. Back in 1986, he initiated the (ongoing) annual Westminster Multi-faith Pilgrimages for Peace that have been such a great inspiration to me.

6 months beforehand

- Locate area and possible route (bear in mind public transport accessibility). Check What's On, to avoid clashing with another event.
- Personally visit each place of worship/leader and find a mutually convenient date (don't be put off by their events – often it's possible and very enriching if they'll allow you to join in/be present at their summer fete or Divali preparations or midday prayers).
- Be flexible and prepared to change the order of visits.
- Liaise with any other local inter faith groups and organisations such as the Local Borough Council, SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education – every council has one) or college or hospital chaplaincy, to pool local knowledge and resources and share publicity opportunities.
- Notify police
- Write letters of confirmation of date to faith leaders (very important!).

3 months beforehand

- Finalise route and timings – need actually to walk the route, to time it precisely and to determine the exact streets and where the

safest crossings are. Check out the details of public transport, bus stops, parking etc.

- Discuss with faith leaders, the content of the 'programme' and talks and refreshments/ disabled access/ toilets at each place.

If possible, get the leaders to meet and discuss it together (over a meal?).

Ask for a max 15 minute talk about an aspect of the faith eg the Qur'an (rather than try and cover all of Islam!) and about the worshipping community and *always* leave time for questions.

All food should be vegetarian and non alcoholic.

- Prepare publicity (ours is a single sided A4 flyer which includes the route and all necessary information – see example below).

Be sure to get the names of buildings correct.

- Send draft of flyer to each faith leader for approval and accuracy.

2 months beforehand

- Get the publicity printed (include info that picnic lunches should be vegetarian/bring head coverings if appropriate).

- Email/post 10 copies to each of the faith leaders and ask them to copy and distribute and encourage members of their own communities *to join the walk*, so that they see each other's places of worship and talk together (important).

- Distribute publicity to as many as possible of the other places of worship and relevant organisations in the locality. Don't forget the police station.

- Invite the Mayor, Bishop and other faith/community leaders, MPs, head teachers, RE teachers and any other relevant people.

- Notify local press.

- Brief one or two people to take photos/film on the day and write reports.

2 Fridays beforehand:

- Put up publicity flyers in 30 local newsagents windows (often have very fascinating conversations doing this!) library etc

- Prepare placards to carry to indicate who you are.

- Prepare leaflets for passers-by (only if they ask who you are – not to be forced on anyone).

- Remind police and local press.

- Consider a thank you gift for each of the hosts (flowers? book?)

On the day:

Take placards, information leaflets, gifts, camera, spare route maps, extra head coverings for entering mosques and gurdwaras.

VERY IMPORTANT:

"We must keep to the timings, so as not keep the next hosts waiting. We have to when I say!"

"Please talk to strangers and enjoy your day!"

Afterwards: write it up, or get someone else to, plus photos, for as many publications as possible. Plan a follow-up event

Greenwich

PLUMSTEAD & WOOLWICH

Inter Faith Walk 2011

SAT 16TH JULY

11am to 8pm

COME & JOIN US!
Meet some of your other-faith neighbours
Learn about their religious beliefs and traditions.
Join in at any point on the way.
BRING A PICNIC (vegetarian - to respect religious customs)
PLEASE DRESS MODESTLY
All cover heads at ⑥
Women cover heads and trousers or long skirt at ②

START: GREENWICH PENINSULA

① THE PRAYER SPACE GREENWICH PENINSULA MULTI-FAITH CHAPLAINCY 11:00-11:45

② GREENWICH ISLAMIC CENTRE 12:30-1:30

③ GREENWICH HINDU MANDIR 2:00-3:20 (lunch here)

④ LEI ZANG SI TEMPLE TRUE BUDDHA SCHOOL 3:45-4:45

⑤ ST PETER'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH 5:45-6:40

⑥ RAMGAHRIA SIKH GURDWARA 6:50-8:00

We are invited to join in langar (food) at 7:30

TRAVEL

- From London Bridge to N. Greenwich @ Jubilee line (20 mins)
- Parking at N. Greenwich @ £7 a day (disabled free)
- Train from London Bridge to Plumstead Station every 10 mins (25 mins). Limited parking on Villas Rd
- From ① to ② we take bus 472 (approx 40 mins)
- Trains from Woolwich Arsenal to London Bridge (20-30 mins)

Travel info: 0843 222 1234 or TfL online

South London INTER FAITH GROUP

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WHY DO WE DO IT?

1. To educate ourselves, to become better informed, more understanding and maybe enrich our own spiritual journey

At each place:

we learn something about the building and how it is used;

about the worshipping community and its make-up;

about one or two aspects of their belief;

we are able to ask some of the questions we've always wanted to ask;

if we're lucky, we'll meet people of that faith community and

if we're double lucky, we'll experience a taste of their faith in practice.

We've been privileged to be present at a Christian baptism and

at Muslim prayers, we've listened to Buddhist chanting, readings from the

Sikh and Jewish holy scriptures and the singing of Hindu bhajans and so

much else

Between the places, we have the opportunity to walk and talk

with people we don't know, with people of different faiths.

So this is how we educate ourselves, learn and understand more – beyond books, internet or watching films, but through first hand experience and encounter.

2. To make local inter faith connections for community harmony and for personal friendships

We find that by doing the walk within a limited geographical area, local people really do meet each other – often for the first time. They enter each other's buildings for the first time, having never dared to before. We hope the encounters will continue after that day; that friendships and co-operation will develop.

If people *already know and trust each other* and can rely on each others support, it can make such a difference when 'religious' troubles happen – whether local or global.

[The Westminster Peace Pilgrimages sometimes do a coach pilgrimage route.

Consider this, if there is not a variety of faith communities and places of worship within walking distance in your locality.]

3. As witnesses to good inter faith relationships, as we walk and talk very visibly together through public places

With our placards and our information leaflets, and indeed our differing visual appearances, as we walk and talk together, we demonstrate positive inter faith relationships. We are showing, by our actions, it's not all bad, as so often portrayed in the media!

Sarah Thorley on behalf of the South London Inter Faith Group (updated 2013)