

Faithful Friends

The Faithful Friends project in Forest Gate began in February 2007. It brings adults of different faiths together to learn from each other and to develop a friendship together. The aim of the project is to be a long-term grassroots Christian presence focussed on the multi-faith, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural area of Forest Gate, and seeks to engage with people of all faiths (and none) and cultures in the area. The project seeks to meet this aim by means of meeting and engagement, education and being a community resource.

Objectives

To provide a forum where people of all faiths and none can engage in inter faith dialogue;

To support and encourage a ministry of friendship and pastoral care for people of different faiths and none in the local community ;

To engage constructively with organisations working broadly in matters of faiths in Newham, particularly the work of Newham Voluntary Sector Consortium in identifying areas where different faiths can work together, and the East London Three Faiths Forum;

To develop a programme of education about the beliefs and practices of different faith traditions for local Christians;

To provide study in theology of inter faith dialogue and opportunity for training in witness that is authentic, respectful and reciprocal while remaining confident and grounded in the Christian faith;

To become a training resource for the Diocese that can offer visiting clergy and parishioners a model for Christian engagement in multi-faith contexts;

To work with all faith communities on issues aimed at fostering social cohesion, particularly in encouraging active participation in and membership of local organisations working broadly in matters of faiths;

To be an inter faith resource for responding to situations of emergency, civil unrest or tragedy.

The project owes much to the ministry of The Revd Barnabas Matloob. He describes how what he first called "Sacred Friendship Ministry" began whilst still in his native Pakistan when he was a vicar in Mianapura , Sialkot Dioceses, Church of Pakistan.

"Based and grounded in the inspired word of our Triune God" Barnabas' particular ministry followed a year of fasting and prayer and involved working amongst Muslims, Hindus, Bahias, Ahmadies and Gagra's. It was "very popular, fruitful and highly admired by all religions and classes."

However, as a first generation convert from Islam, his own life and the well being of his family became more and more difficult and threatened. By selling his business and some land and with the help of the Church he was able to come to the UK as an Asylum seeker.

"By the grace of our Triune God, I brought with me, my Christian faith, Sacred Friendship Ministry and my family".

In 1994 Barnabas began worshipping at St Edmunds, Forest Gate and by permission of the vicar and area bishop he began worshipping in Urdu among Urdu and Punjabi speaking Christians and his Sacred Friendship ministry among other faiths in Forest Gate.

Revd Barnabas' story of dedication, sacrifice and perseverance combined with his ability to communicate with and befriend so many in the local areas is inspirational.

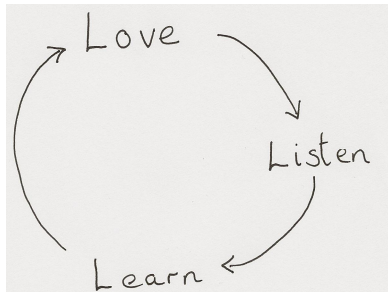
He writes,

"This holy ministry is established and deeply grounded on the command (of love) and declaration (of Friendship) of our Lord Jesus Christ according to St John 15: 9-17. Disciples were called, saved, loved, taught and sent out to love each other and share good news with others and bring much and lasting fruit for their Lord and Saviour."



When telling the stories of his encounters Barnabas always explains which bible passages he has shared with those who ask for his help. Sacred Friendship is about offering the gospel and leaving the rest to God. As he says of his early ministry in Forest Gate "Many were taught the gospel of love, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation but few were saved and baptized at different venues. Glory to God in the highest."

This personal ministry now exists alongside the work of the project. Faithful Friends is currently run through Emmanuel Church Forest Gate. The project links a number of churches and other faith groups in the Forest Gate area. The group of Friends have visited each other's places of worship; shared food; invited each other to festival celebrations and holds monthly discussion meetings.



Plans for 2010 include a public walk from worship place to worship place showing solidarity and concern for the people of Haiti following the January

earthquake, with a collection en route to be channelled through the DEC.

From 2008 -2009 a success pilot project aiming to bring together young people aged 15 – 18, ran alongside the adult group. Due to changes in the youth team it has not been possible to plan for 2010 but a full project is planned from autumn 2010.

For more information contact The Revd Pat Mossop, pat.mos@btinternet.com or visit the website at www.faithfulfriends.org.uk

Ecclesiasticus 6:14-17

¹⁴Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter:

whoever finds one has found a treasure.

¹⁵Faithful friends are beyond price; no amount can balance their worth.

¹⁶Faithful friends are life-saving medicine; and those who fear the Lord will find them.

¹⁷Those who fear the Lord direct their friendship aright, for as they are, so are their neighbours also.