

COUNCIL ON FAITH NEWSLETTER

The official newsletter of the Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London's Council on Faith



First London Interfaith Fun Run unites communities

A global message of unity and friendship between people from diverse backgrounds was sent from London on Monday 30th August as the inaugural London Interfaith Fun Run brought together hundreds of people from different communities.

The first-of-its-kind event held at StoneX Stadium in Barnet saw hundreds of runners challenge themselves and raise money for charities, the majority in London but some joining virtually by running in their own area as far away as Hyderabad, India.

There were plenty of exciting activities to experience at the London Interfaith Fun Run, such as an international food court, a prayer and reflection space, Cloud Nine inflatable Zone and an 'Interfaith Zone' with facilitated dialogue activities.

Runners and spectators were treated to a diverse range of music, dance and storytelling performances in collaboration with Faiths In Tune who organise interfaith music festivals and events across Europe. Performances included Shumei UK, Shree Muktajeevan Swamibapa Pipe Band, Propa and friends, MTO Shahmaghsoudi, and London International Gospel Choir.





The London Interfaith Fun Run organisers, the Faith & Belief Forum in partnership with Maccabi GB, were joined by 34 other charities who brought supporters and beneficiaries to run, fundraise for their cause, and take part in the other activities on the day. Charities ranged from refugee support organisations, to those tackling climate change, and those bringing together different faith groups to build trust and understanding between neighbouring communities.

Hagir Ahmed, attendee, said: *“I was inspired by the London Interfaith Fun Run as a chance for the refugees and asylum seekers to have the opportunity to participate and engage, while socialising with positive people from all religions and cultural backgrounds.”*

Phil Champain, Director of the Faith & Belief Forum, and one of the runners on the day, said: *“The London Interfaith Fun Run is a great opportunity to bring people of different faiths and beliefs together while showing our support for charities doing important work in London and beyond. After 18 difficult months with very limited social contact and many challenges, this positive event, bringing people together, is just what many of us need.”*

The London Interfaith Fun Run was sponsored by Dangoor Education and supported by Her Majesty’s Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London’s Council on Faith. Sir Kenneth Olisa, Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London, attended the event and spoke to the audience about the important role the city’s faith and belief groups play in supporting their communities, demonstrated clearly by the many ways they have helped people through the pandemic.

David Dangoor CBE, chair of the Council on Faith, who initiated the London Interfaith Fun Run project and was there on the day to lead the countdown for the 5k and 10k run, said: *“We hope it will inspire many of those who form the beautiful social tapestry of our great capital city, be they young or old, whatever their ethnic group or faith, to join together in strengthening the bonds that can help make London a strong and welcoming, diverse, community.”*

To watch the highlights from the London Interfaith Fun Run visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVhjeuPUPUM>

Interview with Sir William Atkinson DL

Sir William Atkinson spent 42 years teaching in secondary schools mainly in Inner London, including 27 years as Headteacher of four different schools. William has extensive experience of working with the voluntary sector and is currently Chair of the Canal & River Trust London & South East Advisory Board. He has contributed to a wide range of TV and Radio broadcasts. In 2008, William was Knighted for services to Education and the Community.

William is the chair of HM Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London's Occupation Council, we interviewed him to find out more about his background, experiences and vision for the Occupation Council.



William, you have had a fascinating life and career. Please tell us about your personal and professional background?

So, I'll start with my life story. I came from Jamaica at the age of seven with my mother and two brothers to join my father who had emigrated 5 years before that. He had settled in England after travelling around the Americas, in the search for work that would enable him to reunite the family. We joined him in April 1957, I remember it vividly because it was freezing, and I was dressed in a nylon short-sleeved shirt. Whilst in Jamaica we had lived in the interior so had not had much exposure to urban life or diversity – everyone was different shades of brown but was just like us. My first experience of London was one of absolute amazement, when we arrived and took a taxi from Heathrow to Battersea in the drizzly rain, I felt substantially disconnected at the sight of such a different world. But what amazed me was to see white people sweeping the streets because, to me at the age of seven, white people were Gods and so to see this was such a culture shock.

In Battersea, I was taken to the local primary school by my mother and introduced to the headteacher who was a lovely man. However, in those days, very few white people had come across black people, so he was not used to the inflections in my mothers' accent and there was a mix up between me and my older brother. Due to my size, they thought I was nine years old and had been to school for two years (not my brother) but I couldn't read or write and so was seen as a bit of a 'dummy'. This meant I was placed in remedial classes – although I have to say there was no racism involved in this at all as I was the only black kid in that class. At the age of 'eleven' I took and failed the eleven plus exams and shortly after this the school discovered I should have been in a lower year group, so I got moved to be with the other nine-year-olds. This was a good thing but unfortunately by that time I had internalized that I couldn't learn and so I didn't try and became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Later when I transferred to my secondary school, which was a comprehensive, I managed to get into the 5th of 8 streams having failed by eleven plus twice and proceeded to have the time of my life. I had lots of friends for a variety of reasons: I was somewhat of a novelty; racism hadn't been developed in my peer group as there were relatively few black people in Battersea at the time; and I was a keen boxer and so didn't present as a victim of potential bullying. At the end of secondary school, I decided I wanted to become a teacher because my teachers had been so fantastic. Many had been young, keen, and passionate about comprehensive education and the older teachers had been in the war and fought the war for a reason – so working-class kids had a better experience of life.

So that transitions nicely to my professional life. I have been in education for the majority of my career, except for one 'gap year' when I worked as a drayman. I started off teaching in Portsmouth and then in Islington. After a few years in Islington and with further study, I applied for Deputy Headships, after 50 applications I was successful and became a Deputy Head Teacher and moved up to more senior roles until I became a Head Teacher in Brent.

I then spent some time in US on behalf of Her Majesty's Inspectorate looking at how their education system and lessons we can learn in terms of turning around challenging schools. When I came back, I was approached to lead another school and I subsequently spent 18 years in that school. Every time I went to leave something went wrong and so I had to stay on but I loved it to bits. I worked with fabulous kids and teachers and parents we were very poor and didn't know the best way to support their kids but believed in the school and the teachers and above all believed in their young person.

You are a noted civic leader, especially for your services to education and community relations. Please tell us a bit about the work of charitable and educational organisations you are currently involved in.

Yes, I am a trustee at several organisations including the Lyric at Hammersmith and a board member of the Royal Shakespeare Company. I've been with RSC for nine years and during that time I've worked with the education board, supported their diversity and inclusion work and their safeguarding work. They do great work on and off the stage.

I'm involved with a great charity called The Click who works to reduce reoffending by creating restaurants in prisons and gives prisoners a wide skill set in hospitality and support when they leave prison. Also, I chair the advisory board for the London and South East Canal and River Trust.

Please tell us a bit about your role as Chair of the Occupation Council. What are your aspirations for the Council?

After three years of being involved with the Occupation Council, I took on the position of Chair. We decided not to look at occupation from the position of getting people into jobs or commenting on the market place. We decided to focus on the Building Bridges strategy which recognised that although London is one of the richest Cities, there are still substantial sections of our London community that do not enjoying the fruits of prosperity that many Londoners share. These sections of communities are being left behind and are not receiving the same incentives to be part of wider society. Therefore, some subsections of these groups are in danger of adopting on values that work against their interest and the interests of London as a whole.

We are supporting these vulnerable groups by identifying and working with the amazing charities that are already in place and delivering services. We seek to recognise these groups and convene them so we can talk gently about the cutbacks charities are facing and the impact of the pandemic on these groups. People who were left behind are now further behind and instruments of the state that had been removed or reduced. There is a need to champion the needs of left-behind groups, especially the young people.

The Occupation Council also have the intent of working with young people and we have focused on how we can reach young people before they get into trouble, so to speak. Therefore, we are focusing on ages 0-10. This involved supporting the parents, the young people and the agencies set out to help them live better lives and who teach young people responsibility, confidence, goal setting and resilience. To achieve this, we are meeting local groups, opening doors by introducing them to local authorities or other groups, we are putting podcasts on the Lieutenancy websites that profile these charities.

We are currently working with a charity that brings about greater understanding between young people from black backgrounds and the police. Bringing them together for discussions and reducing antagonisms between both parties.

Finally, based on the experiences of one of our Council members who is blind we are focusing on supporting people who are disabled. 80% of disabled people who could be working aren't currently working, this is incredible and shows that this group of individuals are not being catered for. We are currently researching into this issue and will come up with some actions to support charities addressing this and shine a light on the issue.

Events attended by Faith Council members

- On 29 July, The Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London, Sir Kenneth Olisa OBE and Representative Deputy Lieutenant of Wandsworth, Mrs Colleen Harris MVO, visited Challenge South London, at the Royal Marine Reserve. Challenge South London gives young people aged 14-17 from the boroughs of Wandsworth, Merton, Richmond and Kingston an opportunity to take part in an action-packed day of activities run by the Royal Marines Reserve and their delivery partners.
- On 27 September, The Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London, Sir Kenneth Olisa OBE hosted an investiture for nearly 150 Londoners whose contributions to the capital's communities had been recognised by Her Majesty at Westminster Abbey.
- On 24 June, Martin Russell, The Representative Deputy Lieutenant of Barnet attended a service attended by the bishop of London, to mark the centenary of St Michael and All Angels, Flower Lane Mill Hill, NW7.

Upcoming initiatives of the Faith Council

London Faith & Belief Community Awards - 29 November

The Faith Council will be supporting the 5th London Faith & Belief Community Awards that will be returning to the Royal Society of Medicine this year.

The London Faith & Belief Community Awards celebrate the vital work of London's faith and belief communities by bringing together local heroes and shining a light on their inspirational work, demonstrating how Londoners can work together for a fairer and more inclusive city.

To register for your ticket please visit:

<https://lbfawards.eventbrite.co.uk>

The event hosts, the Faith & Belief Forum, are also seeking new sponsors to support this initiative, to discuss opportunities, please email: jessica@faithbeliefforum.org.

