

COUNCIL ON FAITH NEWSLETTER

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

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 1926 - 2022



A statement from The Lord Lieutenant of London's Council on Faith's Chair, David Dangoor CBE DL:

"It was with great sadness and a heartfelt sense of loss that I heard of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. On behalf of the Lord Lieutenant's Council on Faith I send condolences and sympathy to the Royal Family. The Queen touched the lives of so many of us. It is hard to imagine a world without her.

She held more than 600 charity patronages and provided leadership as monarch for over 70 years. She combined her wit and humour with a steeliness and integrity that brought her respect from other leaders across the globe. Her faith was important to her, as was her role as Defender of the Faith. She spoke out openly about her own Christian faith, explaining how it provided the framework for her life.

She was witness, over many years, to the growing religious diversity of her subjects and embraced this also. Her spiritual leadership was demonstrated by her invitation to over 160 individuals from all faith backgrounds to an interfaith reception at Buckingham Palace in 2019. I was lucky to observe first hand her warmth and openness as she greeted each guest personally. This and other events, such as the multifaith reception at Lambeth Palace back in 2012, were indicative of her clear push for religious freedom and for interfaith engagement.

It is with great pride that the Council on Faith, which I Chair, has backed up the monarch in these efforts. The Council, embodying the Lord Lieutenant's principle of building bridges between people of different faiths and beliefs in our richly diverse capital, is an expression of the Queen's passion for faith in all its forms. The Council will work to keep this passion alive, through its continued support for the now annual London Faith & Belief Community Awards delivered by the Faith & Belief Forum.

Many of those recognised through these awards, now in its sixth year, were amongst those who met the Queen at Buckingham Palace in 2019. It seems wholly appropriate that this year the awards ceremony will be at Westminster Abbey, where she was married to Prince Philip on July 8, 1947, and later crowned in June 1953. Seventy years later we mourn her passing and celebrate her outstanding leadership and deep legacy. Rest in peace Queen Elizabeth.

Long Live King Charles."

Queen Elizabeth II's Faith in Focus

Her Majesty was a Christian and spoke many times about the role of faith in guiding her work. In one Christmas address she remarked that “Christ’s example has taught me to seek to respect and value all people of whatever faith or none”. The role of monarch in the UK is inextricably linked to religion as the sovereign is head of the Church of England. However, Queen Elizabeth II had a distinguished reign where she visited and learned from so many different faith groups in the UK and across the world. A few examples of Queen Elizabeth II’s history with faith and religion are detailed below.

Her Personal Faith and Values

The Queen, like all monarchs since Henry VIII, was head of the Church of England. But it is also widely understood that Elizabeth II was one of the most deeply religious monarchs of recent times. She attended private prayers every Sunday and the Bible greatly influenced her work.

Her Christmas addresses often illustrate her profound faith, as these are one of a few speeches she was personally responsible for writing. In December 2000, she explained that “the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life”. On four separate broadcasts, she discussed the parable of the Good Samaritan. She used the parable as a call for action to help those suffering famine around the world and more recently to honour those who helped us through Covid-19 through dedication and sacrifice.

Notable throughout her reign was a commitment to inclusion of all faiths in civil society - not just the Anglican tradition she grew up with. In her first ever Christmas message in 1952, she asked that people of “all faiths”, not just Christians, pray for her ahead of the 1953 coronation. This is a subtle but definitive nod to interfaith action.

Her inclusive attitude was seen yet again in 1966 in the run up to Commonwealth Day Service of Affirmation of Faith. The Queen wanted Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims to be an active part of the service in a Church at St. Martin-in-the-fields, which she would attend. While the move to allow non-Christians to participate in a Church service was controversial, Elizabeth made it a condition of attending future services like this. The strong commitment to inclusivity pushed the Anglican Church in the UK towards greater inclusion and paved the way for wonderful events like the Diamond Jubilee in 2012.



Golden Jubilee, Visits to Multiple Faith Communities, 2002

The Golden Jubilee in 2002 was one of the most significant celebrations in Her Majesty's reign. Yet she made time to visit multiple faith communities. The Queen visited the Highgate Hill Murugan Hindu Temple in London, the Manchester Jewish Museum, The Islamic Centre in Scunthorpe and the Sikh Guru Nanak Gurdhwara in Leicester.

The visit to the Islamic Centre held particular significance as it was the first time that a UK monarch had visited a mosque, 133 years after the first one was established in Woking. Speaking in 2022, the Chariman of the centre recalled that day, saying "he was a person that could make you a friend within seconds... she was down to earth, very brave as well, she was a very nice person".



Visit to Lambeth Palace for the Diamond Jubilee, 2012



At an interfaith reception in 2012, the Queen helped mark her Diamond Jubilee along with leading figures from Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths in the UK. The Queen spoke about diverse British faiths and how the Anglican Church "has a duty to protect the free practice of all faiths in this country", reaffirming her commitment to an open and tolerant society and her role as Head of State.

Every faith group in attendance brought with them an object of particular significance to the religion to demonstrate a key facet of the faith.

Ongoing Holocaust Education

In 2000, the Queen inaugurated the UK's first permanent Holocaust memorial at the London Imperial War Museum. In 2005, she also had 300 Holocaust survivors visit St. James Palace. The Chief Rabbi of the time, Lord Sacks, recounted how she stayed long after the scheduled time to give each survivor the due attention and respect they deserved.

She was a patron the UK Holocaust Memorial Day Trust from inception in 2005 until she passed on the duties to then Prince Charles in 2015. Also in 2015 she made her first ever visit to a concentration camp, Bergen-Belsen. She met with survivors and laid a wreath at the site.



Interview with Randeep Lall DL

For the full audio interview, please visit: <https://soundcloud.com/faithbeliefforum/fbf-meets-randeep-lall-dl>

Would you like to share any reflections following the death of The Queen?

I have always been aware of The Queen's importance, but I don't think I realised how important she was until this moment. Not just physically, but spiritually. We can reflect on The Queen's funeral and think about the whole world standing still for her. In my eyes, she was someone very special, very spiritual. God was the theme of her whole life. For me, that's it, nothing more than that – having God in your life.

My message is that when we have someone with us, we almost take them for granted. It's only when they pass away, you realise how special they are. I don't think she ended up Queen by accident or coincidence. If we look at ourselves as the bricks of the UK, the Queen was the cement, she held us all together. Watching The Queen's funeral has had a big impact on me. From Balmoral to Windsor, everyone has had the chance to come out and pay their respects. She was the people's Queen. An amazing person, a spiritual person and without her we are going to see some changes but I am excited to see what the reign of His Majesty King Charles III has in store.



Randeep, you have had a fascinating life. Please tell me about your personal and professional background.

I've been married for 25 years nearly with two children in university. My background growing up was in the University of Westminster where I studied IT. When I finished education I went into IT. My parents are practicing Sikhs, so I was encouraged to go to the Temple, to pray, to serve humanity, to learn my language Punjabi, to learn an instrument and how to sing.

My grandad played a massive role in my life because we lived in one house and slept in the same room when I was young. His voice still echoes in my ears, of him praying. He was very spiritual. He used to say "Do you pray? How much do you pray? Make sure you carry on praying. Next time I ask you, make sure you've increased your prayer!". He used to carry polo mints, and everyone would get one. He lived to over 100 and received his telegram from the Queen. He was a big influence.

Then life became very busy. I always knew that there was a bigger purpose of my existence. I can't go to work and get home when it's dark, wake up and repeat. Where do I spend time with my family, or progress spiritually?

So, every single day there was this question. I thought to myself that if I start a business then I can do some stuff I really want to: travel the world, meet people, help people. In 2005, my children were three and four. I got made redundant after 10 years. I sent an email to another charity just before I got made redundant asking them to place me anywhere in the world. If there's a disaster, I want to pull people out the rubble. I want to help. I want to do something to make my existence mean something. I felt like I was doing standard things, but I wanted to do something more. From 2005-2008, I spent lots of time with my children. All their school trips, pick them up, go to the park every day after school. They remember that now. In between this, my brother and I set up a chauffeuring company. By 2008, a couple of us got together to make a difference in our local area. This is where NishkamSWAT started.

You are the founder of NishkamSWAT, can you tell me about your charitable work in your local area and beyond?

My life is based around the higher power. Absolutely nothing is an accident. Remember I talked about my desire to actually do something? We didn't go out to set up a charity to feed the homeless. This happened through my desire, through the blessings that we received. I think it's important for me to relay this message because I have so much faith. I have so much faith. We set up a youth club to educate about the dangers of drugs and alcohol in our local areas and that was going fantastically for a year. One of the drug workers came along and said, "there's a homeless person, can you help him".

This was in the borough of Ealing. I thought, 'we can, well I can'. As a charity, we can't because we are youth, drugs and alcohol. But as an individual, as Randeep, I can go and see this person. He was from India but had issues with his documentation. I asked where he slept and he told me. I went at 2am to find out if he was telling the truth. He was exactly where he said he'd be, under a shelter where there was a garage on the side of a doctor's surgery. It was open at the front and back and it was raining, so the rainwater was running right by him, just about missing him. I thought 'wow, this teaches me a big lesson about trust'. I went to see him the next day and told him I was willing to do whatever he wanted to help him, anything. He had no money, he ate from the Sikh Temple, he washed in the toilets. He needed a place to stay, money and clothes. He said he wanted to be repatriated back home. We made all of it happen over a period of months.

But he told me that there were hundreds of others like him, all hidden away in this area. And that's where the real project started, for us. The social action for me was important, because am I going to claim to be a good person? Probably not. I'm going to give the credit to my faith, to my parents, to God, to my guru. Because they're the ones who have taught us that this is what we need to be doing and how we need to live our lives. I thought, what I'm going to do is meet these people, to organise these people to come to Southall. They came, we listened to their individual stories, and found out what they needed.

I decided we'd speak to the council, immigration, faith leaders, police – anyone that could help. Can you believe that not a single one wanted to do anything for them? We were told it was complicated, they didn't have the right documents, they shouldn't be here anyway, because they'd come illegally. I said "they're human beings, we still need to help them as human beings". This is when we decided we were going to do something. I'm going to do something because this is who I am and because this is what my faith teaches me – if no one else steps in, we step up. This is where the project started.

From 2009-2012 we were in Southall. We started in the boots of our cars. Second year we borrowed a van. Third year we fundraised and bought a van. The project started growing. For us, the project was so important because there was a disconnect between the younger generation and Sikh temple. They were struggling to find ways to connect people to the temple. This almost became a backdoor to your own spiritual journey by actually walking the path of the message. So, it became really important that we do this and then we can educate, help and encourage others.

Through your experience as a Deputy Lieutenant, what would you say the importance of community work is?

I think the first, most important thing is diversity. I'm a turban-wearing sikh that is now a DL representing the Royal Family. I'm here, I'm doing the role and I'm different. The important thing is diversity. Equality is very important too.

Through my experience of Deputy lieutenancy, the importance of community work is bringing people together and about education of good values. It's about getting the real, true message out about the real Lieutenancy, who we represent, what we do, what our role is, and who the Royal Family are. I hope that makes sense!

What do you like about being part of the Council on Faith?

Firstly, I'm able to share my personal journey and my personal stories about who I am as a practicing Sikh with other likeminded individuals. I think that I'm also learning so much about others, about who they are. It's also talking to people of different faiths at different levels. It also makes you realise and endorses the idea that how we are, we're all one. The more we speak, the more we engage, the more dialogue there is, the less differences I see in people. The other thing, it's about showcasing who I am, my faith, where I come from, what I stand for, what my duty is as a human being, for other human beings.

What are your aspirations for the Council on Faith?

I'm going to jump in at the deep end and say we want to achieve world peace! You have to think big to get something done. To have more dialogue, to learn more about others. I also think that we should be looking at avenues and ways to preach to those who aren't being preached to. I don't mean preach a religion as Sikhs are non-missionary. But we are all on a certain level, and there is a level which is being missed out. I want to think about the ideas and ways for the levels which are being missed out and think how we can engage and inspire people to know what we do, who we are, what we stand for, how we can help them and how they can help us.

Hundreds Fundraise at the 2nd Annual Interfaith Fun Run

It was an active August Bank Holiday for the hundreds of participants in The London Interfaith Fun Run. With over 50 charities supported, participants got their sports gear on ready to complete the 5 or 10km routes around the StoneX Stadium in North London to support a host of good causes.

With more than 750 people in attendance throughout the day, the track events were only one among many highlights. There was Capoeira with the African Portuguese Speaking Community; Afghan, Kurdish, Iranian and Arabic dances performed by refugees from New Citizens Gateway; drumming with Shumei UK; and The Jive Aces brought Jive and Swing energy to the party too.

The 2022 instalment of the Fun Run is its second year and represents a partnership between Maccabi GB and the Faith & Belief Forum, created with the support of the Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London's Council on Faith. Among the charities supported were those raising money for refugees and asylum seekers, foodbanks, the homeless, climate change, and interfaith projects too.

David Dangoor, the Chair of the Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London's Council on Faith, who initiated the Interfaith Fun Run project, said "The London Interfaith Fun Run is an opportunity for Londoners, whatever their ethnic group or faith, to come together and send a message of unity and friendship. It clearly shows the enormous amount of good this city's diverse communities and cultures can do when we all work together".



His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London was also in attendance and Sir Kenneth Olisa spoke to the crowd as well as taking time to sample all the various stalls comprising the Interfaith Zone. Phil Champain, director of The Faith & Belief Forum said "Events like the Fun Run are a reminder that our society works best when people of all backgrounds, cultures and beliefs are united". Alongside the high energy musical performances and running also featured the Interfaith Zone which was a bustling space featuring all the partner groups in attendance on the day. This was an area where people of all faiths were meeting throughout the day, learning from each other, and making the new connections.

For the younger members in attendance there was also an arts and crafts zone, a Fun Zone featuring bouncy castles and inflatable sides, as well as a range of different food options from multiple cultures. Overall, this was a special and very pleasant way to get active and get engaged on a fine August Bank Holiday afternoon!



Updates from Council on Faith members

On Sunday 11 September, Dr Mustafa Abu-Lisan DL opened the ceremony of Reading the Proclamation for the accession to the throne of the new Sovereign, His Majesty King Charles III to the people of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea .



On Thursday 15 September a Muslim memorial service was held for HRH Queen Elizabeth II at the London Central Mosque in Regent's Park. Bushra Nasir CBE DL was one of the 3 keynote speakers. She spoke about her service for Great Britain, Commonwealth and globally. Attended by over 200 people , it was an opportunity to celebrate the life of a great monarch, her leadership and her respect for all the different faiths.



On Thursday 29 September, members of the Council on Faith held their quarterly meeting at Greenwich Islamic Centre. They were generously hosted by the Deputy Director, Sanam Mia, Imam Swaleh and Cllr Adel Khaireh and enjoyed a tour of the centre in which they were informed of its history and social impact.

Greenwich Islamic Centre (which was originally a pub) is the only purpose build mosque for the boroughs of Greenwich, Bexley and Lewisham. In the 1970's there was no mosque in the area and a few Muslims used to get together to pray in houses until they started using a local church hall in Woolwich. Today they are a large diverse multi-ethnic community (including Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Nigerians, Somalis, Arabs, Kurds, Albanians and many others) that has hundreds of people attend the daily prayers and classes at the mosque. The mosque has facilities for women and children and welcomes our non-Muslim neighbors and visitors.
