

COUNCIL ON FAITH NEWSLETTER

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

Hundreds Fundraise at the 3rd Annual Interfaith Fun Run



Hundreds of people from all backgrounds and beliefs reunited for the 3rd annual London Interfaith Fun Run, which took place on Sunday 3rd September at StoneX Stadium. Driven by the power of sports, the Fun Run successfully fulfilled its aims to create an enjoyable community-driven event that promoted physical activity, whilst supporting local causes and building new connections.

Participants of all ages and fitness levels took part in the camaraderie by running, walking, or jogging either 1km, 5km, or 10km, and most importantly fundraising for causes ranging from homelessness and food banks to interfaith, refugees and asylum seekers, represented by over 35 charities.

The London Interfaith Fun Run 2023 was organised by the Faith & Belief Forum and Maccabi GB and supported by His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London's Council on Faith. The event organisers' emphasis on inclusivity and participation made it a memorable occasion for all involved.

Phil Champain, Director of the Faith & Belief Forum, said: "This is more than a fun run – it's a festival! There has been an amazing atmosphere today with hundreds of people from such a diverse range of faiths coming together. The Fun Run celebrates what we're already doing and building further bridges as we work to bring communities closer."

The event offered more than just running as participants enjoyed vibrant performances, sampled foods from different cultures, had interfaith encounters, played in the Family Fun Zone, and met charities at a buzzing Charity Fair. The diverse performances, curated by Faiths in Tune, included Zende Delan, London International Gospel Choir, Kirtan London, The Oranim Dance Troupe, and Siri Sadhana Kaur.

David Dangoor CBE said: "Why are we here today? In 2015, the late Queen Elizabeth expressed her desire to witness faiths coming together, working together, and playing together. Since then, through the Council of Faith, we have undertaken a multitude of activities across Greater London. These initiatives aim to recognise and bring together inspiring charities from diverse faith and religious backgrounds who tirelessly strive to support and uplift their fellow Londoners."

Many organisations were partnered with to make the event a success. They are: Maccabi GB, the Faith & Belief Forum, Church Times, Dangoor Education, Eastern Eye, Faiths in Tune, Jewish News, Jewish Volunteering Network, Asian Media Group, and Voice of Islam Radio.

Interview with Sir Kenneth Olisa OBE

How did you get into community work? We know you've done so much and now you're in this position, why are you doing it all?

Well, I think the answer to that question is quite simple, really. I think you can define humanity into one of two sets of people: those who get pleasure out of helping other people and those who get pleasure out of harming other people. The good guys and the bad guys. I'm proud to say I count myself as a good guy. I can remember that sort of epiphany really, when I was at school and I was in something in my school rather bizarrely called the Old People's Welfare Committee. But basically it was a little subset of the 6th form that did good works. And the good works that we did, that I can remember doing, was decorating a flat of some chap who obviously had neurological challenges, and three boys went in with paint and brushes and so on. None of us had ever decorated anything before, but this is the

enthusiasm of youth. And there was this poor bloke who'd had his flat taken over by three thugs who painted everything nice magnolia colours and so on. And we transformed this miserable little hovel of a flat into something rather exciting. So as far as we were concerned, we were painting walls. So, we did it. We said goodbye to him for two days, he said goodbye to us and that was the end of it. And I'm sure our thoughts drifted onto football and girls and all those other things. And about three or four weeks later, I was walking down a very long road in Nottingham, my hometown, and I saw this chap called Frank coming towards me. I panic because I don't want to talk to this bloke. So I crossed the other side of the road and he crossed the other side of the road and I thought, I'm going to have to talk to him! And I don't know what to say because he was a very strange man. And he hugged me and he said, "thank you for decorating my flat". I got a real rush of pleasure. I always remember that moment and all my fears and worries and disinterest and so on washed away. And I think I've been pursuing that bias ever since. I've spent a lot of my time in charitable endeavours seeking and, I'm pleased to say, receiving that rush frequently.



You set up three councils: Heritage, Occupation and Faith. Why include Faith?

Well, first of all, I did it as Lord Lieutenant and my role as Lord Lieutenant, simply put, is to uphold the dignity of the Crown. When I first took over, I thought my mission has got to be to build bridges. This is a wonderful, wonderful city, but there are still lots of gaps between communities and groups of people and even individuals and the communities in which they exist.

I started with an open door here, but I looked for ways to amplify what I would consider to be that human condition. And I thought, so what's the lens, what's the baseline, what's the foundation, perhaps, to do that?

My answer is, if you sit with a stranger because there aren't enough seats and you start to talk about something, what do you talk about? Well, I can guarantee that the things you are most likely to talk about are your family, your heritage, your job and your faith.

Now, you may not talk about all of them, but you will talk about things chosen from that. And if you break that down from a community perspective, the three that matter the most to a community, are Heritage, Occupation and Faith.

And even if you don't have a faith, faith is still there. And I have an office of responsibility, in Westminster Abbey, as the High Bailiff, and I hear the Dean, for example, welcoming people of all faiths and none. But the and none means actually you're still in the same circle, it's just you don't have a particular faith. So faith is really important. And I think the proof of the pudding is in the work we've been able to demonstrate in London.

It is worth reminding ourselves that the King soon, I mean days after his accession, invited the leaders of the major faiths in the country together for a meeting just to discuss the importance of faith in our nation.

Would you agree that there's a stronger recognition of the role that faith-based organisations play in society and in London's communities now?

I think big time. I think what's really interesting, though, is the faith-based organisations themselves, particularly ones that we work with in the context of the awards, are so busy getting on with the task, that they've not really had time to think about whether they are alone or whether they're part of a greater movement. And what together we've been able to achieve is to create an environment where they meet. I think the highlight for me was when we had the event at Westminster Abbey.

I recall now [at the London Faith & Belief Awards 2022,] we had over 300 people from different small faith-based charities all chirruping away in this iconic faith-based building, Westminster Abbey, welcomed by the Dean of Westminster Abbey. This wasn't just a meeting room, this was an amazing coming together and the videos of that still lift my spirit. And by doing that amplification, it means that better work, more work, more impact is happening in London, which is what building bridges is about. And of course, it's what the monarchy stands for.

I know when I started the Faith Council, there was some pushback from within the Lieutenancy. "Faith is at the root of all conflicts in the world" etc. Very tiresome arguments, but nevertheless, I had these arguments put to me, and my answer to that is, no, that's first of all not true. Despots are at the root of all those things. And they may use faith as their excuse to be despots, but it's despotic behaviour.

But much, much more importantly, even if you were right, the antidote is dialogue. And dialogue comes from people of different faiths, different grounds of belief coming together. What's so satisfying is seeing people from different faiths discovering common ground and then doing good. And that's been very much the experience of the Faith Council and its members who have been tireless in the work they have done, not just in the awards, but more generally across the promotion of faith and its importance in society.

Do you have any reflections or aspirations for the borough-level Faith and Belief Awards?

I'm all about bringing us together. And the reason it becomes so key to do it at the borough level is because what we're talking about, obviously, by definition, only happens at the borough level. And if you have civic pride in a borough, then part of the reasons to be proud are seeing what your fellow citizens are doing to help other fellow citizens in whatever way it is they need, whatever the circumstances. But civic pride is a very, very important part of our nation and this great capital city.

I'm pleased to see the faith dimension of the civic dimension - double dimension there! But the combination of those two things being increasingly recognised within the boroughs, and then finally, if you are a small faith-based charity in borough-X, you need resources, you need support, you need helpers, and they're going to come from within the borough, and whether it's a local shopkeeper, donating something, etc. The borough level piece is key. I have three years to go as Lord-Lieutenant. I would hope that in this particular context, my legacy will be all of the boroughs in London have faith and belief awards of some sort and it will last for a long time.

Waltham Forest Faith & Belief Awards Celebrate Local Heroes

In keeping with the Council on Faith's vision to build bridges and showcase local faith community work, the inaugural Waltham Forest Faith & Belief Awards highlighted community projects in the borough, inspired by faith and belief, which provide much-needed services to local community groups.

The Awards were hosted at Fellowship Square, in the Waltham Forest Council Chambers. Over 100 local community members were present to celebrate the work of 29 faith and belief groups in the borough, before 8 projects were ultimately presented awards. There was also an excellent interlude by local Nasheed performer Farhana Ali, as well as a second-ever performance from the Waltham Forest Community Choir. Their music filled the room and got everyone on their feet!



The winning projects were celebrated for the excellent work they provide. Among the winners were; Cornerstone Baby Bank, who collect free resources for parents to use for newborns; Forest Churches Emergency Night Shelter who serve the homeless community by providing shelter, including during Covid-19 and by providing meals; and Salaam Peace, a community programme which uses sports and social activities to shine a more positive light on the Muslim community, and has been operating since the 7/7 bombings to promote employability and social skills for young people.

The full list of winners and information about the Awards can be found at [Waltham Forest Faith & Belief Awards Winners & Recognised Projects](#).



Events Attended by Monarchy, Council on Faith Members and DLs

The Council on Faith visited the Royal Foundation of St Katharine (RFSK) on 6th July. There was a tour of the centre before the meeting started. The current Master, the Venerable Roger Preece, explained the history of the charity. The Council on Faith thank Roger Preece for a most interesting tour and presentation.

RFSK was founded by Matilda, the wife of King Stephen, in 1147 as a hospital for the poor outside the walls of the Tower of London. It remained there for 678 years until the construction of St Katharine Docks in 1825 where it moved to a site in Regent's Park. In 1948, Queen Mary, wife of George V, moved the Foundation back to East London. In 2011, it opened its doors to the public as an urban oasis for groups and individuals to stay, meet, reflect or retreat. It has always been the prerogative of the reigning queen to appoint the Master.



As part of the annual Interfaith Week and in collaboration with Hounslow Friends of Faith, Rosi Prescott, Representative DL for Hounslow, attended an evening at the Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha on 13th November. The theme was *Women Leaders in Faith and Interfaith*. The evening was attended by Rt Revd Dr Emma Ineson, who is the Bishop of Kensington, as well as MPs and senior representatives from a range of faiths. The Bishop gave an address on Women Leaders in Faith & Interfaith, followed by Q&A. There was also tree planting, a tour of the Gurdwara and refreshments.

Rosi said "She [Dr Ineson] was an inspiration and the event was very well attended".



The Council on Faith visited the Fo Guang Shan Temple for their meeting on 14th November. Attendees, including the Lord Lieutenant, were taken round the former parish school and Church House, just off Oxford Street. The Temple consists of four floors with a Main Shrine, two additional Shrines, meditation hall, refectory and a library. The Council on Faith were given a personal gift each as well as being treated to a lovely vegetarian meal afterwards.

