

Diversity of our Multicultural Cities - WFWP Birmingham, UK

Patricia Earle
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Birmingham, like many of our West European cities, is a place of incredible diversity. Since the Second World War, there has been a steady increase of people migrating for both economic and political reasons. This has presented many, well-documented challenges, but also tremendous opportunities to engage and learn from one another.

The Women's Peace Meeting which began in 1993, as a project of the Women's Federation for World Peace, has benefited from the variety of people in our city, growing from just a handful of ladies to a current situation where there can be more than 40 nationalities represented in the same room! We are women of different faiths, cultures, racial and ethnic backgrounds, social status and age. Truly a melting-pot.



One consequence of this, and the many positive experiences which the meeting provides, is that I have been invited to speak about the Women's Peace Meeting, and the broader aspects of my work for the Women's Federation, in a wide variety of communities and settings.

March 2015, is a good example. On the 2nd, I was invited to attend a meeting in a mosque in Small Heath (which has a very high percentage of Muslim residents), where the women had organised an open evening for members of local Christian congregations to learn more about Islam.

Then, on the 5th, I travelled to the leafy suburbs of Sutton Coldfield, invited to speak to the Mother's Union at a traditional Anglican Church, where the (largely female) audience was almost 100% white, and the average age around 60!



On March 28th, the venue was an independent black-led church in the inner city where the pastor, Rev Derrick Dunkley, had organised a ladies' day in conjunction with International Women's Day, and I was one of two keynote speakers. Rev Dunkley wanted to expose his congregation to the opportunities, present in our city, to work with other communities and organisations, to support them, and bring back the riches of experience to his local church. This is quite an unusual, commendable attitude and I was able to help this aim, and made a number of wonderful friends in the process.

On March 30th, I was invited by the Secretary of the Birmingham Council of Faiths to give a talk about the work of WFWP to the International Conference of Unitarian Churches, being held at the Hilton Metropole Hotel. I was one of 5 local speakers who had been asked to talk about projects which are bringing people together to encourage positive engagement.



And finally ... a talk to the Congolese community of the West Midlands, about 60 of whom had gathered together to commemorate the 1st anniversary of the death of a prominent musician, Emenaya Mubiala. His wife had come from Paris, and after the meeting we discussed the possibility of WFWP in France supporting her humanitarian work in the Congo.

In conclusion, it is always a unique privilege to speak, and represent the voices of so many amazing women who have been meeting together for a number of years now. I feel very humble in light of their continued commitment to meet together, sharing our heart of concern for peace, and trying to find ways to give practical expression to that concern, through educational, social and humanitarian projects and activities. So many women resonate with WFP's key aims: Education and Family, Peace and Reconciliation, and Humanitarian Action. I hope we can continue our efforts for many more years to come.

