

Celebrating 40 years of Interfaith Work in Watford

Françoise Murphy
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Celebrating 40 years of interfaith in Watford.

Watford Interfaith Association (WIFA) celebrated forty years anniversary on Sunday 9th July at the Watford Grammar School for Boys. Many of the old timers such as past chairs, secretaries, treasurers and members of WIFA were present including Geoffrey Bould himself.

It all started in Geoffrey Bould's living room in 1977 in Watford. Geoffrey had invited some of his friends for a social and they came to discuss the various faiths of his guests. They enjoyed their time together and decided to meet again on a regular basis. This meeting led eventually to the creation of the Watford Interfaith Association.

Rev Dr Geoffrey Calvert, our present chair, welcomed everyone and a PowerPoint presentation guided the attendees through the journey WIFA took over the years with its various projects and achievements:

- The Peace Garden in Cassiobury Park
- The annual Week of Prayer for World Peace
- Harold Meyer Memorial Lectures
- Interfaith discussions
- Inter schools art competition on diversity in Watford
- WIFA contributions to the Sacred Space at the Watford Celebration
- School Assemblies
- Interfaith cricket tournaments
- Annual interfaith pilgrimage
- The establishment of the Watford Faith Leaders Forum

At 40th Anniversary Celebration, the Watford Elected Mayor Baroness Dorothy Thornhill, WIFA Patron since 2008 reflected on how much WIFA had grown and developed over the years. "Some of those interfaith meetings may seem insignificant, she said, but what they achieve is that people from all faiths come together and keep communicating with each other. We need to keep the conversation going especially today with all the uncertainty with terrorism."



Dorothy Thornhill with Dr Rev Geoffrey Calvert

Our special guest for the day, Harriet Crabtree, Executive Director of Interfaith Network for the UK, reiterated the importance of communication between people of all faiths. All the interfaith work done over the years is paying off today in helping to control the tensions between the communities. She gave the example of the incident at the Finchley Mosque where people of all faiths came together to help. Harriet wished for more young people to come forward to support interfaith as today those who are involved are mostly volunteers from the older generation. She told us that Watford was well known all over the country for its interfaith work mostly due to the high quality photos WIFA had provided in its reports thanks to Christophe Murphy.



Harriet Crabtree 40th Anniversary WIFA cake



Harriet Crabtree and some of the attendees

A special water ceremony followed where representative of 8 different faiths' were invited to pour a glass of water into a single bowl representing the world meaning the water of life of each faith coming together for the betterment and peace in our world. Then we all recited together the international prayer for world peace. After some testimonies, Harriet Crabtree cut the anniversary cake and the MC closed the afternoon inviting everyone to spend time together over refreshments.



R-L- Judith Bruni, Jehangir Sarosh, Yogesh Joshi, Mary Fudge

The work of interfaith has evolved greatly over the years. There is less an insistence on promoting one's faith and more openness and acceptance of each other's faiths and the need to work together for the common good of all.

Françoise Murphy
WIFA Hon. Treasurer