

National Interfaith Week Watford pilgrimage - Five major faiths in one afternoon

Françoise Murphy
November 18, 2018



On National Interfaith Week, Watford Interfaith Association held its annual interfaith pilgrimage, calling at 6 places of worship around Watford. The pilgrims spent around 20 to 30 minutes in each place and received a bite-sized introduction to the different faiths and their communities.

In Watford, we are fortunate to be able to walk to all these Holy places and be introduced to the world's major religions in just one afternoon. On Sunday 18 November, at the start of the pilgrimage, people were cordially welcomed at the Watford and District Synagogue with warm drinks and delicious kosher pastries. It was Mitzhah Day and the Rabbi told everyone that: 'On Mitzhav day we are encouraged to do good deeds but we should do good deeds not just on Mitzhav day but all year round'. Rabbi Levine then thanked the Chair of Watford Interfaith Association Dr Rev Geoffrey Calvert for WIFA's words of sympathy and support on the occasion of the tragic incident of the shooting at the Synagogue in Pittsburgh. He also expressed his appreciation for the regular meetings with the Faith leaders of the town which had been most enlightening for him.



Leaving the Synagogue and walking through the High Street, the pilgrims arrived at the Central Mosque where they were welcomed by Imam Saleem. After a short presentation on the basic beliefs of Islam, a member of the Mosque gave a most impressive demonstration of the call to prayer.

The Elected Mayor of Watford Peter Taylor by that time had joined us at the Mosque together with his young family. Grabbing some delicious pakoras and other refreshments the group hurried to the Velmurugan Hindu Temple. The priest performed for us a ritual prayer holding candles over the altars of the various deities. We found out that Brahma is the main god with 2 other major gods: Vishnu and Shiva but all in all Hinduism counts over 33 billion gods, who are parts of the whole of Brahman, the god of all.

We had a look at all the colourful altars of the various deities and then we were off to our next stop: the Al-Zahra Centre.



For the first time since the start of the annual pilgrimage 9 years ago WIFA was able to include the Shia Mosque in its itinerary. Beautiful Arabic calligraphy quoting verses from the Qur'an were decorating the walls. When one of the participants asked if there were good relations between the Shia and the Sunni Muslims in Watford, the answer was affirmative. It had been a splendid sunny autumn afternoon and despite the weariness of the pilgrims, the mood was cheerful and keen.



We then arrived at Holy Rood Roman Catholic Church, a magnificent church, built as a gift of one man who converted to the faith over 200 years ago and designed by the same architect as Westminster Cathedral. The priest led us in a song of fellowship and after a look around the church we reached our last destination: the Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha.

A short introduction to Sikhism and a great amount of questions from the participants ended the pilgrimage. Following the Sikh tradition of serving a free meal to all people, we were all invited to a warm and delicious meal at the conclusion of this fascinating journey through Watford, experiencing a glimpse of 5 major faiths in just one afternoon.