

Northstowe Faith Strategy Group Meeting 21 June 2023

Present:

SCDC: Ellen Bridges (EB, Development Officer)

Representing Hindu Samaj: Aparna Nigam (AN), Kruti Neema Faldu (KNF)

Representing Emmanuel Church, Northstowe: David Runciman

Representing Pathfinder Church/Anglican Church Pioneer Ministers Rev'd Dr Beth Cope (BC) and Rev'd Stephen Dove (SD)

Apologies

Northstowe Town Council: Mark Nokkert

SCDC: Clare Gibbons and Mihaela Stan

Representing Hindu Samaj Northstowe: Apologies received

1.0 Minutes from last meeting

- MN had asked if the Faith meetings from last month could be shared as part of the Full Council meeting pack. It was agreed at the meeting that the minutes could be shared but members of the faith group felt the discussion element the faith groups had regarding respect should be limited to stating a discussion was had regarding respect for faith groups and a conversation was had regarding liaising with the schools.
- BC updated the group on her action to liaise with Pathfinder Primary School and NSC to attend future Faith Strategy group meetings. Ms Phillips, Pathfinder Primary School RE teacher will attend the June meeting and NSC will attend the September meeting. (Group checked calendars and agreed 20 September). BC also updated the group that Yr. 10 students who have not been removed from Ethics had just sat their first Ethics GCSE paper which covered Islam and Christianity. Ms Philips has also just been on an RE training day so will be able to share with the group when each year group will study what.

2.0 Cultural Event

- Unfortunately MS was unable to attend the meeting however the group discussed a possible event as part of the Cultural Exchange events Mihaela is looking to organise.
- The group agreed it would be important to agree a theme/topic/focus for the event. Inter-faith week is 12th-19th November. Felt a Saturday would be best for the event so Saturday 18 November was agreed although timings to be agreed. Groups to hold as a place holder and discuss further at the June meeting. **Action: Faith groups to discuss what theme they think may work best for the event and discuss in June.**
- Could be added to the Winter Festival Calendar and within that week could faith groups could potentially offer to go into the schools.

3.0 Discussion from last meeting

- Following on the discussion for respect for faith groups at the last meeting. JM shared with the group that he had shared a list of 10 questions with Emmanuel Church attendees to understand what offends/upsets them. JM heightened to add that when he refers to offending/upsetting he means grieved/sad, not necessarily angry. 44 attendees responded. The most common response was people misrepresenting Christianity closely following by people using Jesus/Christ as a swearword and people mocking or disrespecting the bible.
- BC also updated the group that they had also had some discussions. Pathfinder Church are deeply uncomfortable with the question 'what offends you?' and would much rather see good understanding and respect develop through talking about what is precious.
 - "As Christians, we believe that God is Holy, and deserves our worship and respect. We also believe that this world and all its people are precious too - because they are all made and loved by God. Therefore, our deep desire is that respect and care is shown to everyone. It offends us, both as humans and Christians, when such care and respect is not shown.
 - We don't expect that everyone will share our understanding of God as Holy. So, while we might wish that they could come to know the joy of God's love,

we don't expect that everyone will share our practices. We try to be understanding of that.

- In return, we hope that people will treat our beliefs with respect. Asking questions is encouraged. Mocking is not!
 - With regard to specific religious practices and objects, there is very little that we would find "offensive" if people act with the common courtesy of being a guest in someone else's space. We think there is very little opportunity for anyone to cause offense during a religious service, or in a religious place if they are participating respectfully. As an ecumenical church, with a wide variety of Christian beliefs* and practices, we recognise that people would do things differently. But that doesn't mean we get offended by this. For example, some might choose to bow before a Christian Altar -- but others wouldn't even call the table at which we share communion an "Altar", and wouldn't bow. What matters to us is that people act with integrity to their beliefs. However, we would ask that they show the common respect of not cluttering up, messing with, or wilfully damaging special spaces - like chapels, churches, churchyards, or prayer spaces."
- MWA thanked BC and JM for sharing the discussions with the group and it is likely Northstowe Muslims will do a similar exercise. MWA to discuss with the trustees.

AOB:

- MWA asked for an update on the information available for the webpage and EB apologised that this was not live yet. **Action: EB to create webpage**
- BC asked if the intention was still to open the bidding process in January 2024. EB confirmed this is still the intention.
- EB informed the group that the hirer charges are still to be finalised, but all faith group bookings will be charged at the Northstowe Community Group rate which has been proposed to be £12/hr to hire one assembly room or £20/hr to hire both. There will also be office space to hire at £6/hr or £8/hr depending on the office if a small group wishes to discuss something. As soon as the booking process is live EB will update the faith groups.