A Meeting of Minds and Faiths in Birmingham

Posted on Thursday 6th September 2007

Faith leaders are working with the University of Birmingham to bring together the different communities and religions in the city as part of a new project which launches next week.

The Birmingham Faith Leaders Group, academics from the university and other decision makers in Birmingham have teamed up the Faiths for the City project which will address issues surrounding religion and multi faith communities, while shaping the city's future as a positive centre of diversity and integration.

The three-phase project, which was initiated by the university's multi-faith chaplaincy, will launch on 11 September at the university's Great Hall with the Faiths for the City event. The evening will feature a cultural programme of music, art, poetry and photography from the different faith traditions.

During the event academic theologians representing the six major faiths in Birmingham* will ask: "What makes a good city?" based on scriptural texts or traditions with equivalent authority, taking into account the history of their interpretation. Following the publication of the papers, six members of the Birmingham Faith Leaders Group** will give a talk informed by the relevant academic paper, focusing on the contribution that their faith tradition can make to Birmingham.

Sajida Madni, project administrator and University of Birmingham Young Alumna of the Year, 2007, said: "As Birmingham continues to evolve as a multi faith city, the need becomes greater for the different faith communities to relate to each other and to the city at a variety of levels. As well as developing friendships and working together on common issues, it is important that the religious communities are able to contribute with substance to the pressing debates about the future of our city.

"Although Birmingham has a relatively good track record in community relations, serious issues are under the surface. Demographic figures point to a city which is becoming increasingly polarised - divided along ethnic, religious and economic lines - and in which religion is set to assume a much higher profile. There is a danger of segregation, marginalisation and radicalisation, especially among young people. In this context, it is vital that city institutions and sectors are engaging in high quality dialogue with the city's faith communities. New channels of communication need to be created between the city and the faith communities, and between the faith communities themselves."

The project will continue with three events in which faith leaders and other, younger representatives of their communities will talk with sectors of the city about specific areas of concern, including business and commerce, the environment and the quality of living in Birmingham. At the end of each event a Memorandum of Understanding will be proposed detailing new or improved channels of communication as well as specific projects.

Finally, a book bringing together articles by members of the Birmingham Faith Leaders Group and other material related to the project, will be published in the autumn.

Ends

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*The University of Birmingham academics are: Dr Jabal Buaben (Islam), Dr Elizabeth Harris (Buddhism), Revd Dr Toby Howarth (Christianity), Rabbi Dr Margaret Jacobi (Judaism), Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal (Sikhism), Dr Sharada Sugirtharajah (Hinduism).

**The members of Birmingham Faith Leaders Group are: Mr Dinesh Chauhan (Hinduism), Dr Muhammed Naseem (Islam), The Most Revd Vincent Nichols (Christianity), Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh (Sikhism), Rabbi Leonard Tann (Judaism), Vajaragupta (Buddhism).

The aims of the Faiths for the City project are:

To bring together city institutions, faith communities and academics in order to address specific issues of concern for Birmingham;

To develop new and existing channels of communication between these groups, focussing on their leadership;

To produce published material on the contribution of faith communities to the city;

To achieve a set of formal commitments by the parties involved to continued communication and to working together for the good of the city;

To establish a paradigm of cooperation that can be offered to other multi faith cities across the country.

For further information please visit www.faithsforthecity.org.uk.

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