

THE BIRMINGHAM POST

Weekend reflections

in partnership with WMFF and BCF

October 13

A Very Special Time for Muslims



OR over a billion Muslims worldwide, the sighting of the new moon this week signals the end of the month of Ramadan and the start of the festival of Eid.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “Whoever fasts the month of Ramadan out of faith, seeking its reward, shall have all their past sins forgiven.” He also said of the time of Eid, “They are days of eating, drinking, and remembrance of God.”

The word ‘Eid’ is Arabic for ‘rejoicing’ and festivities begin mid-morning, but only after prayers have been offered at a mosque. During the prayer, Muslims will reflect on the lessons of Ramadan and will often resolve to continue the year exercising self-control and avoiding excess.

The prayer also provides an opportunity to remember that whilst we may be celebrating, millions around the world cannot afford to do so. Charity is therefore an obligatory part of this day, offered on behalf of every Muslim man, woman and child – and given to help the poor to celebrate Eid. Only after reminding ourselves of God’s infinite mercy would the official festivities begin.....

.....and what a celebration it is! Spectacularly colourful and intricately designed clothes are worn. Huge feasts are prepared. Friends are invited home, family members are visited and gifts are exchanged. All in all, it’s smiles all round.

Our faith renewed and celebrated after Ramadan, we can then continue with our daily lives as better Muslims and human beings, God willing! May you all be blessed likewise.

Hamayoon Sultan is a Sunni Muslim of Kashmiri descent who was born in Birmingham 28 years ago. He works as Development Education Co-ordinator for Islamic Relief and lives in Sparkbrook. The text in the paper was subedited down without consultation; the above is the original version. In addition articles have now been moved from the editorial section to a box at the foot of the opposite page.

October 20

Harvest



HE last few weeks have seen several Harvest Festivals held in the schools of the city. Some may regard this traditional practice as an irrelevant hangover from the past, as very few children in Birmingham were giving thanks for the safe gathering in from their local farm. They may just be pleased that it is available from their local supermarket! Is it, then, beneficial to continue celebrating harvest?

We may agree that it is good to foster in children a sense of gratitude for having something to eat, in contrast to just taking it for granted. From a Christian point of view, the ‘thank you’ is to God. If in churches, however, we only give thanks for the gifts, we can be guilty of a kind of complacency and we infer an understanding of God as partial and only concerned with some, rather than all, of his family.

Recognising our gratitude for God’s gifts gives us an opportunity to remember those for whom the harvest has failed - or been washed away. This point was made at a school harvest festival I attended recently. With no tomatoes or apples in sight, children shared what they had learned about poverty and hunger in the world, and told parents and the rest of the school what they were doing to try to send the fruits of the harvest to their neighbours in other countries. This is a genuine expression of thankfulness that seeks to share the blessing with others.

Jill Stolberg is Adviser for Religious Education and Collective Worship to the Diocese of Birmingham and worships at St John’s and St Peter’s Church, Ladywood.

October 27

A sense of belonging

I wasn't born in Birmingham. I'm the son of 'reverse' economic migrants. My parents actually took a cut in salary to come and work here in 1970! It was a 'calling' they told me. They worked in the Selly Oak Colleges for almost 20 years. I grew up in a tiny village of 500 people in north Lincolnshire, during the 1950's and 60's.

One Anglican church, one Methodist chapel, one pub, a post office, a butcher's shop and then the village store, run by my dad and his brother, supplying just about anything to everyone. I had a genuine sense of belonging and a simple, clear geographical identity.

It was a far cry from present day, multi-everything Birmingham, where I've lived since 1991 with my wife and four children. The question I often ask myself is - Can my children ever have that same sense of community and local, geographical identity? In the community cohesion debate, we talk about the 'Asian' community, the 'Sikh' community, the 'Irish' community ...but what about the sense of local community which includes all of us as human beings?

Recently, some of our religious leaders, religious academics and many people of faith and good conscience discussed 'What makes a good city?' at Birmingham University. If we can rise above self-interest and personal agendas, we should pursue this discussion, at different levels, with our elected officials. The collective voice of faith has much to say in creating this sense of belonging.



Dr David Earle was raised in the Methodist tradition and is currently employed as Midlands representative of the Universal Peace Federation as well as being their national Vice President. He has a special interest in bringing young people of all faiths together on projects organised in the Saltley, Nechells and Small Heath

inner city districts. He and his wife have also established an Interfaith Children's Home in south India.