

## THE EALING TRINITY CIRCUIT



### Faith and faiths...

This interview with Dr. Joy Barrow offers the opportunity to think more deeply about the impact of people of other faiths on today's world, our churches and our individual faith. Joy belongs to the Ealing Trinity Circuit where she works as the Circuit Administrator. She is also part time Director of the International Interfaith Centre in Oxford, a member of the executive Committee of the World Congress of Faiths and of the Connexional Inter Faith Relations Committee.

### Tell us a bit about yourself...

I was born in Reading, about 400 metres from the Reading Football Club ground; although they've moved their stadium I'm still a season ticket holder. Academically I was a school failure and left school with five GCEs when I was 17 years old. I worked in the Civil Service for seven years before going to All Nations Christian College. All my family, were atheists – I'd started going to church through a school friend - so they were far from pleased with my giving up a career to go to Bible College. At All Nations, surrounded by theology books and the support of a loving Christian community, I flourished. At their suggestion I then gained a BA (Hons) in Theology. I had always wanted to teach Religious Studies, my first post being in Southall where I first encountered Sikhism.

### How did your interest in the Sikh faith develop?

I felt a close connectivity with the Sikh faith, both because of the friendliness of the community, but also its emphasis on equality of humanity and meditation. I also became involved in interfaith dialogue. When I took my MA in Religious Education, I focussed on Hindu and Sikh pupils, and subsequently researched Sikh spirituality for my PhD.

### How does that fit in with your church membership?

I'm a member of Kings Hall Methodist Church in Southall, which is part of the Ealing Trinity Circuit.

My church membership has been varied. In Reading I went to the church of my school friend and Bible Colleges assigned you to a church. In the early 1980s I went through a difficult time personally and for some time didn't go to any church. Then a mutual friend introduced me to Dr John Parry, who was co-ordinator of the URC/Methodist Church interfaith project based at Kings Hall. I started attending Kings Hall and the churches loving acceptance led me to becoming a church member. I was then encouraged to become a Local Preacher.

### ...and how have you found that experience?

Preparing services is a dynamic process and I often find that God is challenging me and I am then sharing what I've learned with the congregation. My aim is to be Bible based and include teaching, but also to give the congregation something to reflect on during the days ahead.

**So how does that fit in with your interest in another of the great faiths of the world?**

I have always felt deeply privileged to have had the opportunity to study theology, and to be involved in meeting people of other faiths, especially the Sikh community and interfaith work of different sorts. I would encourage everyone to develop links with people of other faiths.

**How might we go about that?**

Maybe through something as simple and natural as talking to neighbours or people when shopping – you will find they welcome questions about local religious and family celebrations – or involvement in social activities. You could also attend a local interfaith group, details of which you can get from the Interfaith Network for the UK. [e-mail: [ifnet@interfaith.org](mailto:ifnet@interfaith.org) Telephone: 020 7931 7766].

**Do you find that as Christians we are sometimes reluctant to take such steps?**

Often Christians are concerned that contact with people of other faiths will undermine their own faith, or they will be encouraged to convert. My own faith has been enriched by my involvement in interfaith and my Christian faith has always been acknowledged and respected.

**QUESTIONS:**

- What are your reactions to Joy's story? What questions would you like to ask her?
- Are there any points in her early experience of life and faith with which you can identify? What do you think the reasons for her linking up with King's Hall and her experience there might have to say about the life of our own church?
- What contacts do you have with people of other faiths? What has been your experience of talking about faith issues with them? Have there been any points in such meetings and conversations at which you have felt your own faith challenged? If so, in what sorts of ways? Are there things that have surprised you in the beliefs of those of other faiths that you have met?
- Are there things that concern you about making closer links with people of other faiths?
- What do you think might be the advantages of a better understanding and closer links with people of other faiths? What might you individually and your church do to get things started?

**Bible Study:** Psalm 119:93 'I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways' is a special verse for Joy following her time at Bible College. This study will look at the passage in which that verse occurs, Psalm 119:89 – 96.

**QUESTIONS:**

- How far would you agree that 'God's faithfulness in creation' is the basis of the Psalmist's faith according to verses 89 – 92? How far is it possible to build faith on the stability, wonder and mystery of creation, when science explains so much and the environment seems so vulnerable?

- 'Meditation' is a key word for Joy both in her thoughts about the Sikh faith and in the verse she chose. How important a part of your experience is meditation? What does it mean to you? What are the ways you most enjoy meditating?
- Faithfulness to the laws and wisdom of God that run through all creation is what gives the Psalmist life. How far do you think that sort of faithfulness still make sense for us as Christians who base our faith on the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus?

**To learn more about the International Interfaith Centre: [www.interfaith-centre.org](http://www.interfaith-centre.org)**