

## **WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK REPORT 2020**

### **ST PHILIP'S CENTRE, LEICESTER UK**

From Saturday 1st February 2020 as part of UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, nearly 20 families who have never met before came together as part of a new scheme designed to build friendships and understanding between Hindus and Muslims.

St Philip's Centre – a charity working for interfaith understanding, launched a groundbreaking scheme titled, 'Come Dine Together', which is modelled on the Channel 4 programme 'Come Dine with Me', which sees people who have never met before eating together and getting to know one another.

'Come Dine Together' coincides with UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, a period which allows faith groups to become aware of each other by building ties as well as being a focal point from which all people of goodwill can recognise that the common values they hold, far outweigh the differences they have. UN World Interfaith Harmony Week is the brainchild of HM King Abdullah II of Jordan.

During this period, Hindu families were paired with Muslim families, who welcomed each other into their homes for a shared meal or gathered at restaurants. A total of nearly 60 people took part.

Nafeesa Katib, a Muslim who welcomed a Hindu family into her home said, "The reason for our family to be part of this great idea of Hindu-Muslim friendship meals was to break down barriers. We are all the same and the only difference is that we have different religions and cultures which make us unique. We welcomed people from a different faith into our home to introduce them to our world and for us to learn about their religion and perspectives on life."

Nima Suchak, a Hindu who in turn met a Muslim family added, "It has always been important for me to have friends of all faiths and backgrounds. I'm very grateful to the St Philip's Centre for this initiative to bring us together as families and for us all to realise that we are stronger and better together".

Riaz Ravat, Deputy Director of St Philip's Centre said, "The currency of interfaith work is food. This vital need will form the basis of this important piece of work to initiate and harness friendships between Hindu and Muslim families who have never met before. We cannot be complacent about good community relations and our hope is that these families continue to flourish their friendships in the long term. We have some dedicated families who are intrigued and excited. This scheme may form the basis for extending out to other faith communities."

Mr Ravat added, "This is a unique partnership between Muslims and Hindus which are the second and third largest religious communities in the world respectively. Many of the families which have taken part have global connections to countries in South Asia and

parts of Africa through migration and family history. This richness and diversity led to some very interesting conversations.”

The global flavour of the project is evident by the many different countries which the participating families have lived in such as India, Malawi, Mozambique, Pakistan, Portugal, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

On 14<sup>th</sup> March 2020, all the families who participated will come together for a ‘Chai and Chat’ event to share their experiences in order to create a wider friendship network.

Comments from other families who took part:

- “The children found lots in common – formed new friendships – loved it!”
- “We found so much in common in regard to our family and work backgrounds. Also shared views on reason for religion – love of God!”
- “Amazing couple, really enjoyable, have scheduled coffee again next week!”
- “The two families in question got on excellently. We had many things in common and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. We have plans to invite each other to our respective homes and aim to keep developing our friendship.”
- “We were keen to open our doors to other religions and to break down the barriers of division...[and] to show youngsters that even though we are different, we all have a lot to share and respect.”

In 2017, St Philip’s Centre ran a similar scheme titled, ‘Faiths, Forces & Food’ which used the same concept as 30 different families from diverse communities welcomed members of the British Armed Forces into their homes for meals as part of the Remembrance commemorations. In 2018, the Centre ran the same for members of Leicestershire Police.

‘Come Dine Together’ is supported by Near Neighbours - a national programme which brings together religiously and ethnically diverse communities through community projects.

Website links:

<https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/hindus-muslims-dine-together-part-3786625>

<https://www.hindumattersinbritain.co.uk/Page/Hindu%20Muslim%20Come%20Dine%20with%20Me>

<http://muslimnews.co.uk/newspaper/home-news/muslims-dine-to-unite/>











