

My Faith and Life Under Lockdown – 7th July 2020

Redbridge Faith Forum held its first virtual Women's Interfaith Workshop on the topic of "My Faith and Life Under Lockdown" on 7th July. The logistics of hosting such an event did cause some trepidation for staff but Saira rose to the challenge and together with Carol as co-host everyone enjoyed the opportunity to "see" and "hear" each other via Zoom.

Saira welcomed everyone to the meeting and a poem was shared:

Saving Grace *by Margaret Healy*

Today I have been brave or stupid, I'll let you decide
Twelve weeks was just too long for me to stay locked up inside
It's been so hard and something snapped, I'd had about enough
Lockdown life, for me at least, had proved to be too tough
Normally outgoing, I am quite a cheery soul
But loneliness and solitude has taken such a toll
At eighty-four, I am at risk and vulnerable to the virus
I understand the Government has a duty to advise us
However, and I say this, knowing some folks won't agree
Other people don't know what it feels like being me
And so today, undaunted, I took myself outside
Walking in the sun felt good, it cannot be denied
I sat down on a bench just to take in nature's glory
A child nearby was listening as her mother read a story
She looked at me and asked if I would like to listen too?"
I was already, but said "Thanks, I don't mind if I do"
"Me and mum come every day, she helps me with my reading"
Human contact, kindness too, that's just what I was needing
Her mother finished reading and reminded me again
See you here tomorrow then, around about half- ten
I walked home feeling lighter with a smile upon my face
A mother and her child might prove to be my saving grace
Something to look forward to and friendships made anew

Everyone was then invited in turn to share a positive and a negative from their lockdown experience. It was very interesting to hear from each other of their personal experiences and some common themes emerged especially around the negatives of missing being able to hug and hold family and friends, especially elderly parents and young grandchildren.

However it was so encouraging to hear of many "positives" from this challenging time when as a result of enhanced technology there was the opportunity to participate in online services and prayers, listen to daily devotionals, studies of Scripture and sermons.

Amongst the positives were the following comments:

I am glad I am older and have built resilience to cope with lockdown

I have enjoyed spending more time with my children now I am working from home and not having to commute to work

I have enjoyed daily walks in Valentines Park and fulfilled an ambition to learn the names of many of the plants and trees there with the aid of a plant dictionary.

I have enjoyed practising yoga when it suits me instead of at the usual time of my classes.

It has been so helpful to be able to join several church services from different venues each week as well as being streamed live they are often available to be accessed at a later date on the church website as well as being able to events that have moved from a physical conference to being held online such as Spring Harvest.

I have enjoyed video calls with groups of friends which would not have happened without lockdown.

Our garden has been invaluable – watching nature unfold as the seasons changed from spring to summer, with noticeable less motor and air traffic noise.

Many women were grateful for the opportunity to share in devotions via the internet and all faith communities represented had organised practical help and support for the vulnerable in their community.

The weekly community “clap” for the NHS had brought neighbours together and also in Redbridge it had been so encouraging that so many residents had volunteered their services to RCVS and the council wellbeing service.

One lady remarked how the lockdown had reminded her of how little we actually need in the way of possessions as she found herself away from home staying with a relative for what she had believed to be only two weeks and so she had “travelled light” taking just 3 changes of clothing only to find herself still there 4 months later!

The realisation that practising our faith does not depend on attending a building but we can pray and spend time with God wherever we are is and has been a great comfort to everyone.

Some of our ladies are involved with taking funerals and supporting the bereaved and it has been particularly hard for them not to be able to offer physical support of human touch as social distancing has to be implemented. One cantor shared that she has become an expert in selecting the best time for a funeral to take place to enable live streaming to families living in different parts of the world taking regard to different time zones.

One lady explained how hard it was for people with dementia who could not understand why volunteers could bring them shopping but not come into the home to share a chat and cup of tea as before the pandemic hit. Also how difficult the pandemic has been for refugees and for those living in cramped and overcrowded conditions with little sanitation and no chance of social distancing.

All agreed it has been a blessing to be able to meet together and speak freely to each other. Everyone was invited to share this prayer at the conclusion.

For peace and hope

In a world in turmoil,
in our neighbourhoods, suddenly so different, and homes,
in our restless minds, as we wonder what tomorrow may bring,
hold us in peace and give us hope,
while we wait for the day when we can mix and move freely again;
teach us then to be compassionate with one another
and value more deeply what and who we have,
holding as precious all people and life on earth.

RFF welcomes suggestions for topics for future womens interfaith meetings – please do get in touch by emailing us at faith.forum@redbridge.gov.uk.