

THE CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM WOMEN'S GROUP IN WOLLATON

In the autumn of 2004, as a result of a piece of research undertaken for a new rector, the churches of Wollaton became aware of a significant new fact about the demography of the area, namely that, according to the data collected by the 2001 census, just over 10% of the population now belonged to a faith other than Christianity, with the approximate figures for the different communities being 4.3% Muslim, 3.3% Sikh, 2.2% Hindu, 0.5% Jewish, and 0.2% Buddhist.

Under the auspices of the Wollaton Churches' Committee, a three-week course was therefore run at Kingswood Methodist Church on "Relating to Other Faith Communities in Wollaton", with around 80 people attending. A natural follow-on to the course was a visit to the place of worship of another religious community, and with the help of the Imam (Worship Leader), Dr Musharraf Hussain, and of Rev. Graham Burton of the Rainbow Project, a visit to the Karimia Institute mosque in Hyson Green, and also to the nearby headquarters of "Muslim Hands", a Muslim aid agency, was arranged in February 2005, and this was attended by around 100 people from all the Wollaton churches.

One of the first questions we were asked when we arrived was "Could we come and visit you?", to which the answer was "Of course", and this return visit to St Leonard's church took place on the morning of Saturday 9th July. Around 30 Muslim visitors, of all ages and stages of life, came along to hear something about the history and layout of the church, its worship, its interface with the wider community, and the collaboration between the different churches in the area. The visit had been arranged a couple of months beforehand, but it proved very timely in that it took place just two days after the London bombings on 7th July, and the meeting made it very clear that it is perfectly possible for Christians and Muslims to meet together in a very natural and amicable way, despite the events in London.

On the foundation of this very fruitful exchange of visits, a Muslim-Christian Women's Group in Wollaton was established, and this meets regularly every six weeks or so at Kingswood Methodist Church, to discuss themes of common interest such as festivals (Lent, Ramadan), prayer, pilgrimage, education, the family, the life of Jesus, and the life of Muhammad. A member of the group introduces the topic at the start of the meeting, with discussion following, and normally around 25 people attend, with both Christians and Muslims commenting that it is a good challenge to explain their faith and practice clearly, and explore differences sensitively. Once a year there is a bring and share meal, and this too provides a good opportunity for interaction and discussion. For further details please contact Jean Smith (0115 9285662).