

## **Faith and Citizenship**

Thank you for your kind invitation.

We live in interesting times and it is progressively becoming acceptable to talk about faith and citizenship. Interfaith dialogue helps to maintain cordial relationships, tolerance and peace for all mankind.

### **Faith**

Being a follower of Guru Nanak the first guru of the Sikhs and his teachings, it is incumbent on me not to distinguish or recognise the caste system that was endemic during the time of the first and latter gurus. Furthermore; idol worship, rituals or superstitions were considered ineffective and treated with disdain in the belief of one supreme lord and master 'Wahe Guru' or almighty God. In fact, the first words of the holy scripture of the Sikhs the 'Guru Granth Saheb' start with 'Ek Onkar' meaning One and only one almighty God. Nanak believed in practical living and rendering service to humanity and engendering tolerance and love toward all. Sikhs have a duty, at the risk of their own lives, to save others from danger and oppression and to stand for their own beliefs.

As Sikhs of Guru Nanak and the following nine Gurus who succeeded him, we support people of all faiths. We stand alongside every human's rights to be safe, to live in grace, and dignity and to worship regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or religious affiliation. The Sikh community has made its presence and contributions globally. Sikhs have continued and will continue to work toward equality in each of the countries they call home.

### **Citizenship**

Although early migration of Sikhs to Britain dates back to 1900's they migrated in large numbers to the UK in early 1950's and 1960's from the Punjab, Northwest state of India and from East Africa in 1972. Maharaja Daleep Singh was the last ruler of the Sikh kingdom of Punjab. He was dethroned and exiled to Britain after the Anglo Sikh war. His daughter Sophia Daleep Singh became a prominent suffragette and pioneer of woman's rights demonstrating importance of Sikh beliefs and wider citizenship. The first Sikh Gurdwara (place of worship) was established in Putney, London, UK in 1911 and later moved to Shepherd Bush, London in 1913. In 1990 migrants from Afghanistan came to UK after persecution in their home country. More recently, Sikhs in UK have shown

immense courage and citizenship by starting a charity called 'Khalsa Aid.' Volunteers working for the charity have demonstrated significant impact on various man-made and natural disasters by helping people stranded in these regions. Khalsa Aid was prominent in helping displaced 'Rohingya' people of Myanmar and for people caught in cross-fire in Syria war just to name a few. Khalsa Aid is now recognised as an international aid agency.

### **Interfaith values and citizenship education in schools**

As a SACRE member for several years it has been my experience that teaching of interfaith values and citizenship education in schools is very important. It encourages lateral thinking among our youth and lays the foundation for future based on shared experience of culture, religion and challenges in life for betterment of society. It encourages to be better informed about the world around you, follow rules, law and respect the rights and property of others.

### **Fundamental and unique features of Sikh faith**

*Main founding principles:*

Naam Jupo, Kirat Karo, Wand Shakho

*Literal translation:*

Pray to the One God Almighty

Do good and honest deeds for work, earnings and progress

Share your earnings with the helpless and hapless.

*Other principles imbedded:*

Sikh means disciple of a teacher or guru.

Equality of all human beings.

Do selfless service of the community, striving for justice and prosperity of all.

Honest living and honest working.

Charity and sharing with less fortunate.

Respect for all faith that preach love of God and service to humanity.

*Neeta Baicher*

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