

Development of our Family Evenings and study of the Principles of Peace

Birmingham, United Kingdom, 1. October 2015



By David Earle

As we continue to try and develop our potential to share the Principle with more people, we have been looking at the balance between informal and formal ways of interacting with one another during our Family Evenings, and also the value of sharing with our friends and guests practical things that we are doing in our movement, as well as the principles behind them. In other words, a balance of 'words and deeds' to show that we are 'practicing what we preach'. People generally find this very inspiring and empowering, and it helps them to connect to and more deeply understand the Principle.



Although our evening begins officially at 7.00pm, people begin arriving from 6.00 o'clock onwards. Some are coming straight from work, so we provide some

pizza, salad and drinks. This often draws other people into the kitchen for an 'unofficial' meeting of chatting and catching up with the news! Others can also relax in our living room, where we encourage self-introductions and making new friendships.



We rarely manage to begin at 7.00pm (!) but the friendly exchanges beforehand can help to create a good atmosphere, so we don't worry too much. On moving into the study room, our resident musician, Tom Pritty, generally leads us in a couple of songs which helps everyone to focus together. If there are any Muslim friends with us, we try to sing some gentler, more devotional songs and generally this is no problem for them. Usually any Muslim guests are quite open-minded in order to come to the Family Evenings in the first place.

We try to be consistent in having one Family Evening each week, which is no simple task, and to alternate one week for new/newer guests and then one week for our more advanced guests and new members. We have a core group of brothers and sisters in our community who have been faithfully supporting the Family Evenings for the last few years, and also some of our new members will come along to support the newer guests when we have an introductory evening, which is wonderful.



When we have any new guests Patricia will give a 15 - 20 minute talk, with PowerPoint slides, outlining some of the main activities we have carried out locally, or been involved in at the national and international level : social and humanitarian projects, educational activities, discussion meetings and conferences, and especially meetings

where we bring diverse groups of people together to meet and learn from one another. This gives credibility to what we then have to say, and opens peoples' minds to the possibilities for peace. David then speaks for 40 minutes or so, trying to share a few key points which can catch everyone's imagination, trying to make the Principle relevant to what is happening in our world, and relevant to peoples' day-to-day lives, but also going a little bit on the spirit of the occasion and the feeling coming from the guests who are there.



A few months ago in July, for example, we had an Introductory Talk with several new people present. One was the wife of a Christian minister, and another a young Nigerian woman. The young woman, a Muslim, had come to study in Birmingham but her college had lost its license, and was refusing to refund the fees she had paid, resulting in difficulties for her with the Home Office and her possibly being forced to

return home empty-handed. She was fasting that day because of the seriousness of her situation, and David happened to use her as an example when he was speaking about the mind being subject over the body, briefly outlining her troubles. Patricia had also given her talk about our peace activities. The next morning the minister's wife called Patricia and said that she wanted to give us £1000 : £500 for our peace activities, and £500 for the young woman to help her with her difficulties !



On July 10th, we had 24 people from our advanced group study the life and work of Jesus, and then 12 new guests heard an Introductory Talk on the 17th. In August, with many people being on holiday, we had one evening for our advanced group when 17 people looked at the special role of women in Providential History on the 21st. On September 17th, 21 of our advanced group heard the Parallels of History again with lessons for our present time

(pictured below), and at an Introductory Talk on the 22nd we had 15 new guests from 10 different countries.



We generally conclude each evening with the opportunity to ask one or two questions, or make comments, one song together, and then serve drinks and refreshments. We chat to everyone and encourage them to make friends, with the possibility of meeting again next time and progressing on our journey together.