

## The Family - Heaven and Hell - WFWP Birmingham/UK's Women's Peace Meeting

Patricia Earle  
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"Building loving relationships and healing the wounds." (A Women's Peace Meeting held to recognise the UN Day for the Family, and Africa Day) Held on June 22nd 2017.

Recently, we had another Women's Peace Meeting which focused on the central importance of the family in society, and human relationships. The topic generated a lot of interest and discussion, and well over 100 women came together, as always representing the vast diversity of culture, race and religion in our city of Birmingham. Maureen Slattery-Marsh, our first speaker, is a Clinical and Pastoral Counsellor, working with Immigration and Counselling Psychotherapy (iCAP).



Speaking on a topic close to her heart, she outlined the various types of family we now have in our society, and considered 4 pillars of family stability, recognised universally beyond all our differences. These are Love, Trust, Respect/Honour and Understanding. She spoke about love as the most enduring of the four, but about the fragility of all of them, with serious consequences following their breakdown - not just within the family, but for the wider society.

Maureen mentioned Nelson Mandela as an example of someone who was able to digest his own pain and mistreatment, and then help the entire 'family' of the South African nation to honestly face the pain of its past, and begin to deal with the very real consequences of so many peoples' suffering.



Rana Nazir, Chair of the British Kashmiri Women's Council, described with controlled emotion the intense pain of her own journey through a forced marriage at the age of 18. At that time, many years ago, Rana had to discontinue her studies, having no voice and 'living in a bottle' with no-one to understand her, subject to emotional blackmail and told that "you can study later". Her marriage was eventually annulled, and she began the long, slow process of recovery from both physical paralysis and emotional scarring. When her mother's sister died, she moved to Leeds to help take care of the 3 daughters in that family, managing with time to persuade her uncle to allow them to study and then enter into successful marriage relationships. At the same time, Rana somehow managed to continue her own studies, gaining two degrees and a Masters.

Focusing on peace, love and unity, she could reconcile with and hold her own family together, as well as the family of her former husband! She explained that without reconciliation, problems easily grow out of all proportion, and that just one person can either unite, or break a family apart. She is a living testimony to the power of love and commitment to heal the wounds, and to the belief that genuine peace begins in the home. Needless to say, the topic and the contribution of the two speakers provoked much discussion, with many women wanting to share their heart within the intimacy of our meeting.

Contributions came from some of the young women present, from Christian ministers and those with pastoral responsibilities, from a head teacher, and from representatives of prominent organisations such as WAITS and HopeNotHate.

We could have continued much longer, but had to begin to bring things to a close with candle-lit prayer and several songs from our different cultural and faith traditions, including a beautiful rendition of 'Imagine' by Viola Dirnhofer. As always, we tried to have a practical outcome from the meeting, and this time we raised £100 for Norma to use in a project which is helping widows in Nigeria, working in conjunction with Shepherd Ministries there, something Pauline Anderso has spoken about previously.

It was very encouraging to see the number of women gathered together for the occasion, including around 30 new faces, and many young women present, some of whom had been invited along by their mothers. The safe space which we have created together over the years is a unique environment to be able to freely share our hearts with one another, both for those in need of support, and for others to be able to offer support, many times leading to the development of precious friendships which remove our fears and prejudice.

We feel this is something incredibly valuable, particularly in the present time of much uncertainty and fear, providing hope and the feeling of being one human family. Thanks to Shabnum for making such a lovely, tasty WFWP cake for us all to enjoy!!