

Spiritual festival launches Faith in the City

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By Laura Davis, Daily Post



THE longest spiritual festival in Europe was launched last night during a ceremony at Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral.

Despite the driving rain, thousands of people of all religions, ages and cultures, attended the event where the city's seven major faith communities celebrated faith, hope, friendship and peace.

Fireworks, a lantern procession and a parade of puppets helped herald the launch of the Faith in One City year.

The city's biggest multi-faith choir - with more than 250 members, aged six to 86 - united in songs specially commissioned for the celebrations.

Mike Storey, city council leader, said: "At a time when there is tension around the world and people's faith - however it is defined by them - appears to be declining, Liverpool can stand out as a beacon of hope and understanding.

"The city is bringing together people from the Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Bahai faiths.

"They are working together here to promote greater tolerance and understanding.

"We can achieve so much if we have faith in ourselves and faith in each other.

"The year of Faith in One City will celebrate religious and cultural diversity and will tap into the belief, passion and community spirit which is so important to Liverpool.

"Most religious or spiritual festivals last a month at the longest - Liverpool's celebration will last a year and will involve the whole Liverpool community."

Falklands veteran Simon Weston, whose Liverpool-based youth charity Weston Spirit celebrated its 15th anniversary last year, joined children from faith groups to deliver messages of peace.

He said: "When my world looked like it had no faith in it and I didn't actually know if I would ever believe again, I

came to Liverpool.

"Here, it was restored by the warmth and the care of the people of this wonderful city.

"You gave me back my faith in humankind."

A specially commissioned film was shown on a giant screen, depicting what faith means to the people of Liverpool.

The event drew to a close with an impressive light show outside the cathedral. Crowds saw huge faith images beamed on to the cathedral walls and the sky was lit up with fireworks and fire-writing of the Faith in One City logo.

Wally Brown, Faith in One City co-ordinator, said: "The year of Faith in One City is an important next step on the road to Capital of Culture.

"This spectacular launch will show the whole of Europe that all Liverpool's communities are working together to make this the best Capital of Culture ever."

Faith in One City is the second of eight themed years encapsulating Liverpool's culture in the run-up to the 2008 celebrations.