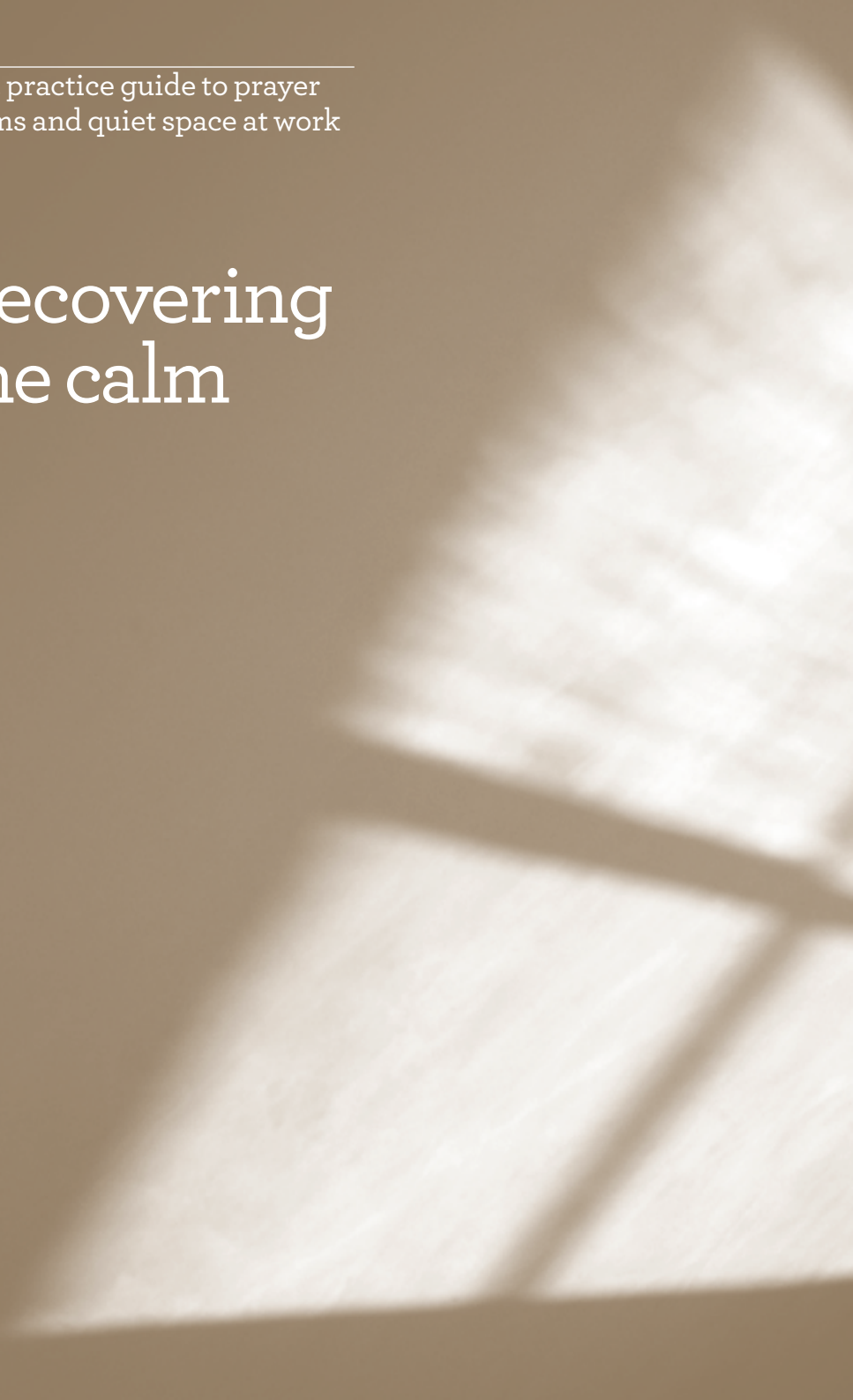

Best practice guide to prayer
rooms and quiet space at work

Recovering the calm



Purpose of the booklet

This guide describes current best practice in creating and managing prayer space for employees. It explores the possibilities and the key issues around purpose-built prayer space. It is intended for human resources and diversity managers, and also for buildings managers, developers, fitters, architects and town planners, all of whom may find they need to be better informed of this increasingly important issue. It aims to flag up some of the potential pitfalls and offers tips for improving the design or use of existing rooms.

For further copies of this guide:
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Preface

St. Ethelburga's Church had stood for five centuries when a bomb tore it apart in 1993. A whole side of the building was destroyed. The roof was blown off. Windows, pews, and altars were damaged beyond repair.

But despite the physical damage, St Ethelburga's spirit survived.

Today, it is a haven of quiet at the heart of the City. Once all but obliterated by terrorism and conflict, it brings together people of all faiths and none in peace. And just as it has come through everything from the Great Fire to the Blitz, it endures as a symbol of hope.

I welcome the contribution that St Ethelburga's Centre has to make to the debate about how we live together as a diverse society – all different, all equal, and united by common values.

It is a privilege to commend this guide to the design, creation and management of prayer rooms and quiet space at work. No matter who we are, I believe we can all benefit from finding a little time to reflect and rise above the daily routine. I hope this guide will inspire many more businesses, large and small, to help people find their own moments of refuge in a busy day.

Rt. Hon. Hazel Blears MP

Communities & Local Government Secretary

Employment law

The Employment Equality Regulations exist to protect employees from discrimination and help ensure an inclusive environment. The regulations cover ethnic origin, gender, disability, age and sexuality. Since 2003 the regulations have also offered protection from discrimination on the basis of religion and belief. This has led many employers to develop an increased awareness of issues of faith diversity and the implications for staff in the workplace. Many organisations and businesses have responded by consulting with staff to understand their faith requirements more fully, and by reviewing and exploring policies and practices. Some employers have taken the first steps towards creating a work environment that is more supportive of people of faith – perhaps by creating a multi-faith network, marking one or two non-Christian religious festivals such as Eid or Diwali, or by offering a prayer room or quiet room for their staff.

For more information on the employment regulations about religion see the resources section on page 25.

Are we obliged to provide a prayer room?

If an employer can accommodate the religious needs of their staff without inconveniencing other staff or having a detrimental impact on business, they may now be obliged to do so. This is called the ‘test of reasonable accommodation’. For a manager assessing a religious need, factors that should be taken into account include:

- _ The cost involved
- _ The effect on the business
- _ Any possible burden or inconvenience to other members of staff

Deciding whether a prayer room is necessary is a balancing exercise between the needs of the employer and the needs of their employees. What is considered reasonable will vary depending on the size of the business, the faith balance and religious needs of its staff, and the ability of the business to be flexible.

If employees have a need for prayer space and a room can be made available without effecting the business detrimentally, the employer may be in breach of the regulations if it does not do so.

The Business case for prayer space

There are a growing number of valid reasons why it makes good business sense to offer quiet rooms for employees. For example:

- _ Within our multi-cultural City and country, working with diversity is now an essential part of good business practice, particularly for larger corporations. Creating quality prayer space offers a pro-active way for businesses to show commitment to equality in diversity.
- _ A good reputation for diversity and a willingness to support employees with faith, helps to attract, motivate and retain staff, which has a positive impact on costs.
- _ Making a statement about the inclusion of people of all religious backgrounds helps to build trust and respect between staff at a time when trust between our faith communities is of increasing importance.
- _ There is a growing body of empirical research showing that meditation and contemplative forms of prayer have a range of measurable beneficial effects on health and well-being (such as increasing the ability to focus and be attentive, helping to manage stress, boosting the immune system, and helping to combat depression and boost creativity).

- _ The fast pace of the City often has a backlash which expresses itself through stress-related illness and burnout. Promoting a healthier approach to work-life balance is now seen as more productive and more profitable in the long run. Quiet space is a way to demonstrate commitment to a healthier and more balanced approach to work practices.
- _ Research shows that a certain degree of pressure increases productivity but a working pace or culture that pushes people too hard or precludes regular breaks actually reduces both productivity and creativity.
- _ Providing a quiet room does not need to be costly for employers. In situations where demand for space is high, dual-purpose rooms are possible.

For more information on the benefits of meditation see resources section on page 25.

Accessibility of places of worship

Britain is historically a Christian country and the accessibility of places of worship naturally reflects that. However, we are a much more diverse nation than we have ever been before and this creates a need which is yet to be fully addressed. For example, the City of London is host to 36 churches and 1 synagogue but has no mosques or temples or other public places of worship. Yet the City supports a very diverse workforce which includes people of many different faiths and cultures.

Christians working within the square mile have many options if they want to spend a quiet half hour in prayer or join a congregational service. People of other faiths are not so fortunate. Muslims in particular are at a disadvantage as their prayers are performed at set times during the day, some of which fall during normal working hours, including the Friday congregational prayers.

It might be thought that churches could offer greater hospitality; yet churches are rarely adaptable as multi-faith prayers spaces because of legal and canonical difficulties and also the nature of the fixtures and furnishings. Equally, the places of worship belonging to other faith groups have been designed for that community and may not necessarily be open to, or appropriate for, members of other faiths.

For City workforces in particular, there is a distinct need for prayer spaces built for multi-faith use. Such spaces may also be seen as symbolic of the need for diverse peoples to work and practice alongside each other for the sake of peace and community cohesion.

Faith and prayer

Prayer and meditation are performed in different ways within different faith traditions. This section gives a brief overview of the requirements of some of the main world faiths, concentrating on the factors which are likely to affect the working day and show the different ways in which prayer or quiet rooms might be used by members of different religious traditions (and also by those with no particular faith tradition).

The Baha'i faith



Baha'is choose one of three obligatory prayers each day: a short prayer said between noon and sun-set, a medium-length prayer performed three times during the day, or a long prayer that can be recited at any time. The medium and long prayers include prostrations and all the prayers are done facing the direction of the shrine of Baha'ullah in Israel (South-East from the UK). Prayers are performed individually and not in congregation. Before each prayer the hands and face are washed.

Buddhism



Buddhism tends to emphasize chanting and meditation practices, but can also include prostrations. When meditating Buddhists may prefer to be seated on the floor or on a meditation cushion to perform their practices, and appreciate quiet and stillness.

Christianity



Christians usually pray either sitting, standing or kneeling. Prayers can be offered at any time of the day, either individually or in small groups. Some Christians will want to share the sacrament of Communion in congregation at certain times or on certain days, e.g. on particular holy days or festivals. During Lent Christians may be more likely to pray, meditate or meet for Bible study, and there are also a number of fast days or days of abstinence.

Hinduism



There are many different styles of prayer, meditation and worship within the Hindu tradition and practices can vary markedly from family to family. Some Hindus try to pray and meditate throughout the day, but not at specific times. Others pray three times a day at sunrise, noon and sunset. Some forms of prayer should not be interrupted and may last around ten minutes. Puja is a devotional ritual performed in groups, often involving chanting, burning incense, and the lighting of small lamps or candles.

Islam



Muslims are required to pray five times a day at set times (dawn, just after mid-day, late afternoon, sunset and late evening). The exact times vary depending on the time of year (see www.eastlondonmosque.org.uk). The Friday mid-day prayer is particularly important (called *jumma*) and is usually performed in congregation and normally preceded by a sermon from the imam.

The prayers (called *salah*) are performed facing Mecca (South-East from the UK) and take between 5 and 15 minutes. They involve a sequence of standing, bending, kneeling and prostrating. The floor surface and

immediate environment must be clean. Often prayer mats are used which offer a clean surface and also some soft protection for the knees when prostrating. It is a requirement to perform a ritual ablution before praying (called *wudu*) which involves washing hands, mouth, nose, arms, face, neck and feet. Women and men often prefer to pray separately so separate rooms or some form of screen can be useful.

During the month of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting, many Muslims are more observant with their prayers than at other times. Often the numbers of Muslims needing prayer space is considerably larger than at other times in the year. The start of Ramadan moves forward every year as it operates on a lunar calendar (for more info see the Business of Faith publication Ramadan: Briefing notes for managers).

Jainism



Jain religious practice varies from individual to individual but can involve chanting, recitation, reading of scripture and silent meditation. Some Jains pray at regular times such as before dawn, at sunset and at night. A common practice is the *Navkar* mantra which can be repeated either aloud or silently and may take up to twenty minutes to perform. This can be done in groups or alone. In the temple, *puja* ceremonies may take place and involve chanting or recitation. An *arti*

ceremony involves lighting lamps before religious images, but this is unlikely to take place outside the temple environment.

Judaism



Jewish tradition has evolved three prayer services for each day – morning, afternoon and evening. The latter two can sometimes be joined together. It is preferable to pray in a quorum of 10 (called a *minyan*), but the prayer liturgy can also be prayed privately. A *mizrah* (meaning East) shows the direction of prayer. A dedicated workplace prayer room could be used for these prayers, but if there are symbols or artefacts from other faith traditions present then more Orthodox Jews may be uncomfortable using the space.

The Sikh Faith



Sikhs perform prayers several times a day. The morning prayer takes about forty-five minutes and can be done at anytime in the morning, usually between 2am and 9am. It involves reciting a passage of scripture from the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book, and is done alone or in groups depending on individual preference or convenience. It is usually performed sitting, and recitation is often out loud but can also be done silently.

The evening prayer, performed after about 5pm, is similar, and takes around twenty minutes. Some Sikhs also meditate (either in silence or repeating the name of God) and endeavour to remember God through the day, by repeating the name silently.

Zoroastrians



Zoroastrians (or Parsis) have five obligatory prayers spread throughout each twenty-four hour period. These are performed in front of a fire, or a symbolic representation of a fire. In addition, Zoroastrians perform a simple ritual each time the hands, face or uncovered parts of the body are washed.

Meditation and quiet time

Alongside the popularity of yoga, meditation has become increasingly widely practiced in this country by people with no particular religious affiliation, either as a spiritual practice or as an aid to mental balance. Some meditators will be happy seated in chairs whilst others prefer floor space and cushions. A quiet environment without bright lights is also preferable. Quiet time and reflection, for people with or without faith, may also be very helpful in managing stress.

Creating and managing effective prayer space

Consultation

It is important to know your staff – what faiths are represented and what needs they might have. A good consultative process will also create a sense of involvement and shared responsibility for the space, as well as build consensus about how the room should be designed and used. It is advisable to start this as soon as possible so that the facility starts off as a collaboration and does not become dominated by any one user group.

Some organisations are now building up data about the faith balance of their employees, for example through staff surveys. If undertaken, this needs to be done sensitively, making sure it is clear the information is given voluntarily and that it will be used in the best interests of staff.

Managing prayer space

Prayer rooms need on-going management and input to function well. Ideally multi-faith prayer rooms should be managed in an inclusive way such that all the faiths using the room are represented. It is good practice to create a ‘prayer room users group’ with representatives from each of the main faith groups involved. This group can work with HR and diversity and buildings managers to make decisions about how the room is set up and publicised, and also to decide on the terms and conditions for its use. Such a group also serves a vital role in ensuring that the space remains inclusive. In practice some faith groups are likely to use the room more

frequently than others (often Muslims are frequent attenders because of the obligation to pray five times each day). Unless carefully managed this can create a situation where people of other faiths (or no faith) feel intimidated and begin to use the room less, resulting in a space which is no longer truly inclusive. A multi-faith committee, with links to both HR and employee faith networks, will help to remedy this.

Sharing the space

Different faith groups may need the room at different times. For example, Muslims will pray most often at the set prayer times and are likely to want to pray in congregation on Friday lunchtimes. Christian groups may wish to instigate a weekly prayer meeting, bible study or Holy Communion. Often the space can be shared quite harmoniously by consulting with all the user groups, agreeing times for congregational prayer, and making sure they are communicated clearly (for example a notice-board outside the room). It is important to collect regular feedback and review the situation periodically to make sure all the room users are happy with how the space is being allocated. If managed well, this approach can help to build understanding and trust between the different faith groups and individuals.

The consultation process may also explore possibilities for one faith group to extend invitations to others to witness or participate in their prayer practices.

Some employers prefer to have a policy

of only offering quiet space for individual prayer and reflection. This may make the space less appealing to some faith groups but it does eliminate any difficulties that may arise if more small groups request congregational prayer time than can easily be accommodated.

Etiquette

Different faith groups and cultures may have different expressions of spiritual etiquette, for example removing shoes, limiting conversation in the space, or the necessity for the space to be kept particularly clean. These are all things which the multi-faith management group will need to be aware of and make provision for.

Communication and ethos

Good communication is absolutely essential to managing quiet space well. Decisions about the space need to be made with the involvement of room users or their representatives, and communicated very clearly. For example, display the terms and conditions for use of the room, and to make it explicit how any rules or guidelines were decided upon. Communication will build relationships between the different faith groups using the space which will make a contribution to faith community cohesion within the organisation and beyond it. It is also important that employees (including new employees) know that the room exists and its location. This can be included as part of new staff induction.

Monitoring and feedback

It is essential that there is some formal procedure for monitoring use of the room and checking it remains inclusive and is treated with respect. Clearly communicated feedback loops are also necessary. All users of the space should know how to register any difficulties or issues that come up in regard to use of the room. A comments box or book can be helpful if users want to make comments anonymously. A comments book will give room users a way to communicate with each other (anonymously or otherwise). Contact with the multi-faith management group or diversity manager will give an opportunity to ask questions or raise complaints directly.

Name and language

Calling the room ‘quiet space’ rather than ‘prayer space’ can make it more welcoming and accessible for people with no faith who might wish to use the room for quiet reflection as part of a stress management programme. However, it makes sense to decide on a clear policy about what is appropriate. Some employees may decide the room is a good place to take their laptop, prepare for a meeting or even take an afternoon nap. If you decide this is inappropriate, this needs to be clearly stated in the room’s guidelines for use or terms and conditions.

Prayer space design

Dual-function rooms

If space is in short supply, rooms may need to have a dual-function, e.g. a meeting room or staff restaurant can be made available at certain times of the day. First aid rooms are also utilised by some organisations when not occupied for medical purposes. If the space is likely to be used by Muslim employees, the time the room is needed will vary as the prayer times change through the year. In summer one or two prayers fall during normal working hours, in winter three prayers. All of these will be after midday, so a room can be assigned that is used for other purposes in the morning. The demand for prayer space from Muslim employees will be considerably higher during Ramadan. In some cases, an additional room may need to be provided.

This section explores some of the factors that contribute to the design of good quiet space.

Location

- _ It is important to consider accessibility and also likely noise levels.
- _ Proximity to washrooms is appreciated by faiths who need to wash before praying.
- _ Disabled toilets can be adapted to provide low sink facilities for washing rituals.
- _ Disabled access is worth considering.
- _ Clear signposting is essential.

Orientation & shape

- _ Some faiths pray facing a particular direction (usually East or South-East). It may be important that the shape of the room fits with that orientation, and that the door is not situated in that direction.
- _ Muslim men and women usually prefer to pray separately. Moveable screens can be provided, but the shape of the room could also potentially be utilised.

Neutrality

- _ It is necessary to avoid any religious imagery rather than attempt to accommodate all faiths.
- _ Neutral colours, simple abstract designs and effective use of light can all be employed to create a beautiful and welcoming space.
- _ Muslims and some others avoid imagery of people or animals.

Lighting

- _ Avoid fluorescent or office-type (overhead) lighting.
- _ Natural light (with blinds for privacy as appropriate) is good if available.
- _ A special lighting scheme that allows a variety of moods and effects, controllable by users, is best.
- _ Some users may appreciate the possibility of allowing candle-light, although such a decision would need to be checked against fire safety regulations.

Heating and ventilation

- _ Body temperature drops during meditation so the space needs to be warm enough (or blankets or shawls provided).
- _ 19 degrees centigrade is a comfortable ambient.
- _ Conversely, adequate ventilation can be essential depending on the room location, during times of congregational prayer if the room is likely to get very full.

A sense of the sacred

- _ Attention to atmosphere is important. Effective interior design paying attention to colour, fabric and light will make a big difference to the atmosphere of the room.

Seating, furniture and accessories

- _ Flexibility is important.
- _ Some faith groups and individuals may prefer to sit on chairs, but others will need floor space and either prayer mats or meditation cushions.
- _ A small table or altar may be appreciated by Christian groups for Communion services.
- _ A screen or curtain to separate men and women may be appreciated by Muslims.
- _ Furniture that can be stacked or folded or wheeled away increases the flexibility of the space.
- _ Shoe racks are helpful.
- _ Storage cupboards for scriptures, prayer mats and possibly also for chairs, may need to be provided.

Religious artefacts

- _ Faith artefacts (such as symbols, holy books, prayer mats) should ideally be stored in a cupboard and put back after use. This allows people from all backgrounds to feel comfortable in the space and not alienated by the presence of other faith objects.
- _ The artefacts can be donated by individuals or groups in the office as required.

Purpose-built prayer space

To the extent that the workforce is a business's most important asset, recruitment and retention in the 21st century is likely to focus increasingly on the quality of the total workplace environment, with facilities that contribute to well-being moving up the agenda as employees become more discriminating.

Increasingly, workforces expect to be consulted on policy and facility provision. However, in the case of buildings designed before an occupant has been found, it would be wise to devise a strategy for locating future prayer space on the basis of optimum location (retro-fitting of facilities so often leads to a compromise that could have been avoided with a little forethought).

Locations for prayer space can then be taken up on a floor-by-floor, tenancy, or whole-building basis as appropriate, with long term flexibility built in (for reversion to office space, for example, or provision of additional or re-located prayer space).

Investment in purpose-built prayer space, whether at initial building design (pre-let) stage, or at fit-out stage (assuming a suitable location had been pre-assigned), is an opportunity for a business to embody its values and showcase its commitment to equality.

Chosen to reflect different aspects of good practice

Case studies



The quiet room at Newham General Hospital, created in 2001, is a beautiful space that offers many pointers on best practice. Extensive consultation with staff, potential room users, and local faith leaders was carried out at every stage of the process, from initial design to continued management and through to a recent extension of the space. A multi-faith prayer room users group has been set up which allows anyone who wants to be involved to have a voice and respond to suggested changes and to give feedback. Staff continue to be involved and feel a sense of shared ownership and mutual pride in the space.

The design is neutral and uses natural light and coloured glass to great effect. There is a good sized washroom and a shoe rack in a separate enclosed space within the room. Prayer mats, holy books and other religious artefacts are stored in cupboards while not in use, and a fold-away screen on wheels offers a simple way to divide the space where needed. A poster explains the etiquette required of room users.

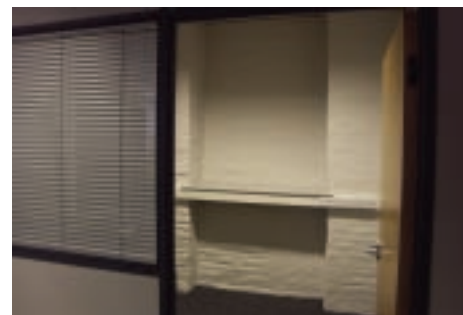
Four congregational services are led by different faith groups once a week. At these times the room is closed to other users. This is communicated clearly on a notice-board outside and also published in employee newsletters.

“Consultation and continued management is the key to success. Here at Newham we involved everyone we could, and tried to accommodate everyone’s needs equally. The room has been so successful we have just extended it”

Yunus Dudhwala, Head Chaplain



After



Before

GNM provided a room for staff at their headquarters which they wanted to be accessible to all their employees – not just people of faith wanting to perform prayers and meditation but also those seeking a quiet few minutes to de-stress. They went the extra mile and brought in a professional designer specialising in prayer space, to create such a room. The designer employed Japanese-style screens and interesting use of light and colour to great effect, demonstrating that even with a small space and within a budget, it is possible to transform a quiet room into a much more atmospheric and inviting space and still be used for prayers. Naomi Lever, Head of HR, commented: “The designer completely transformed what was a drab redundant office corner into an inviting, ambient and calming sanctuary”. The room, which is much valued by staff, not only supports faith diversity but is used as part of a stress management initiative.

Room created by Quiet Room Designs

“The designer completely transformed what was a drab redundant office corner into an inviting, ambient and calming sanctuary”

Naomi Lever, Head of HR



Transport for London have taken the faith needs of their staff seriously and have produced a Faith Equality Scheme to ensure the needs of people of faith in the workplace are understood and responded to. One of the key actions is to develop the provision of multi-faith/quiet room facilities and TfL has demonstrated that prayer space can be created even where space is limited. They have created rooms in over 15 different locations across London including offices, underground stations and bus depots. There are currently more facilities planned as part of refurbishment plans and accommodation changes. Where space is in short supply some rooms are by necessity dual purpose (for example first aid rooms are utilised in some locations). In the past, Faruk Patel, a driver from Woodford Green Dial-a-Ride depot sometimes used to say his prayers in the back of his vehicle. After a room was allocated and repainted, the response from staff was very positive. “It’s good to know they are listening,” he said “It means a lot to us to have this facility”.

“It’s good to know they are listening, it means a lot to us to have this facility”

Faruk Patel



Citi’s multi-faith quiet room is distinctive because of its generous size. A large, light, airy space, almost the size of a tennis court, it boasts floor to ceiling windows overlooking one of Canary Wharf’s garden squares. The room, opened in 2002, can accommodate over 150 people. It is used by employees from across the business, and is full to capacity on a weekly basis. Features include a large shoe rack at the entrance, storage units so all religious artifacts can be out of sight when not in use, a moveable screen, and a comments book for feedback to diversity managers. Existing cloakrooms close to the prayer space, have been converted to include a dual function shower, useful for Muslims who need to wash their feet as part of their ritual ablutions before prayer. Cleaning staff know to fit in an extra visit to the room after *jumma* prayers on a Friday when the cloakrooms are heavily used. A prayer room users group, comprised of representatives from the main faith groups plus Diversity managers, meets every five weeks to ensure all room users are happy and feel respected. The catering manger from the staff restaurant also attends this meeting for informal feedback on faith-related dietary issues.

“A large, light, airy space, almost the size of a tennis court, it boasts floor to ceiling windows overlooking one of Canary Wharf’s garden squares”

Citi’s multi-faith quiet room



BT has created multi-faith quiet rooms in many of its office locations. The next step will involve working with Facilities and Property Managers towards a common policy whereby if a building houses over a particular number of employees, a prayer space will automatically be provided. When new buildings are acquired or existing offices refurbished, quiet rooms will soon be factored in at the planning stage, alongside reception areas, rest rooms, and staff restaurants. Information about availability of prayer space will also be posted on the facilities web-pages relating to each office.

BT's multi-faith quiet rooms are supported by employee faith networks working closely with Diversity Managers. BT offer a very high level of support to their employee networks. In return they reap the valuable business benefit of quality consultation on policy, rapid access to information about faith issues, and a strong selling point for recruitment. Each network has a management committee, an elected chair and must create a business plan, manage a budget and undergo an annual review.

“The network has been instrumental in my staying with BT. We have achieved a lot, both within the business and also outside, through charity and training events. We believe we have an important role to play helping to counteract the media stereotypes about Muslims that have been so prevalent since 9/11. Supporting the quiet room is only a small part of what we do”

Altaf Alim, Chair of the Muslim Network



Any organisation that has a substantial Muslim population will need to consider the possibility of creating purpose-built washing facilities. Muslims are required to make ablutions before prayer (see page 10) which include washing the feet. Using a standard basin for this is perfectly possible but not ideal – a sink closer to the floor with a seat close by is preferable.

Norton Rose created their multi-faith prayer room in 2005 to offer a space for prayer or quiet time to all their staff, and also for their many clients who visit the offices, some of whom are Muslims. The room has integral washing facilities consisting of two low level sinks with a tiled floor and space for two seats. The room was replicated when they moved offices to their new buildings on the South Bank, and is much appreciated by their staff.

“It is important to us to recruit the best possible people for the job, so offering facilities that create an environment and a culture that is fully inclusive can be a distinct advantage for us.”

Lak Purewal, Head of Human Resources

Resources

Business of Faith publications

- _ Religion and belief in the workplace:
A handbook
- _ Religious diversity in the workplace
- _ Meditation and well-being:
A guide for employers
- _ Ramadan: Briefing notes for managers

Links

St Ethelburga's Centre for
Reconciliation & Peace:

www.stethelburgas.org

The Business of Faith:

www.thebusinessoffaith.org

Quiet Room Designs:

www.quietrooms.co.uk

Jon Allen Architect:

www.jonallenarchitect.co.uk

Employers Forum on Belief:

www.efrb.org.uk

Diversity Works for London:

www.diversityworksforlondon.com

Acas site:

www.acas.org.uk

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