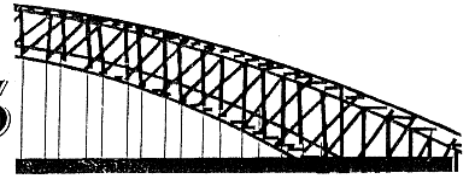


BRIDGES



A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM NETWORK

Sponsored by the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations

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WORLD YOUTH DAY 2008



Above: Sheikh Mohamadu Saleem greeted by Pope Benedict XVI at Interfaith Gathering in Sydney during WYD
Below: A group of pilgrims hosted by the youth of the Affinity Intercultural Foundation



Pilgrims at the Auburn Gallipoli Mosque



Jeena Joyan speaking at the screening of *The Imam & The Pastor* at Darling Harbour

I extend cordial greetings of peace and goodwill to all of you who are here representing various religious traditions in Australia. Grateful for this encounter, I thank Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence and Sheikh Mohamadu Saleem for the words of welcome which they expressed in their own name and on behalf of your respective communities.

Australia is renowned for the congeniality of its people towards neighbour and visitor alike. It is a nation that holds freedom of religion in high regard. Your country recognizes that a respect for this fundamental right gives men and women the latitude to worship God according to their conscience, to nurture their spirits, and to act upon the ethical convictions that stem from their beliefs.

A harmonious relationship between religion and public life is all the more important at a time when some people have come to consider religion as a cause of division rather than a force for unity. In a world threatened by sinister and indiscriminate forms of violence, the unified voice of religious people urges nations and communities to resolve conflicts through peaceful means and with full regard for human dignity. One of the many ways religion stands at the service of mankind is by offering a vision of the human person that highlights our innate aspiration to live generously, forging bonds of friendship with our neighbours. At their core, human relations cannot be defined in terms of power, domination and self-interest. Rather, they reflect and perfect man's natural inclination to live in communion and accord with others.

The religious sense planted within the human heart opens men and women to God and leads them to discover that personal fulfilment does not consist in the selfish gratification of ephemeral desires. Rather, it leads us to meet the needs of others and to search for concrete ways to contribute to the common good. Religions have a special role in this regard, for they teach people that authentic service requires sacrifice and self-discipline, which in turn must be cultivated through self-denial, temperance and a moderate use of the world's goods. In this way, men and women are led to regard the environment as a marvel to be pondered and respected rather than a commodity for mere consumption. It is incumbent upon religious people to demonstrate that it is possible to find joy in living simply and modestly, generously sharing one's surplus with those suffering from want.

Friends, these values, I am sure you will agree, are particularly important to the adequate formation of young people, who are so often tempted to view life itself as a commodity. They also have an aptitude for self-mastery: indeed, in sports, the creative arts, and in academic studies, they readily welcome it as a challenge. Is it not true that when presented with high ideals, many young people are attracted to asceticism and the practice of moral virtue through self-respect and a concern for others? They delight in contemplating the gift of creation and are intrigued by the mystery of the transcendent. In this regard, both faith schools and State schools could do even more to nurture the spiritual dimension of every young person. In Australia, as elsewhere, religion has

been a motivating factor in the foundation of many educational institutions, and rightly it continues to occupy a place in school curricula today. The theme of education frequently emerges from the deliberations of the Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and Harmony, and I warmly encourage those participating in this initiative to continue the conversation about the values that integrate the intellectual, human and religious dimensions of a sound education.

The world's religions draw constant attention to the wonder of human existence. Who can help but marvel at the power of the mind to grasp the secrets of nature through scientific discovery? Who is not stirred by the possibility of forming a vision for the future? Who is not impressed by the power of the human spirit to set goals and to develop ways of achieving them? Men and women are endowed with the ability not only to imagine how things might be better, but to invest their energies to make them better. We are conscious of our unique relationship to the natural realm. If, then, we believe that we are not subject to the laws of the material universe in the same way as the rest of creation, should we not make goodness, compassion, freedom, solidarity, and respect for every individual an essential part of our vision for a more humane future?

Yet religion, by reminding us of human finitude and weakness, also enjoins us not to place our ultimate hope in this passing world. Man is "like a breath, his days are like a passing shadow" (Ps 144:4). All of us have experienced the disappointment of falling short of the good we wish to accomplish and the difficulty of making the right choice in complex situations.

The Church shares these observations with other religions. Motivated by charity, she approaches dialogue believing that the true source of freedom is found in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Christians believe it is he who fully discloses the human potential for virtue and goodness, and he who liberates us from sin and darkness. The universality of human experience, which transcends all geographical boundaries and cultural limitations, makes it possible for followers of religions to engage in dialogue so as to grapple with the mystery of life's joys and sufferings. In this regard, the Church eagerly seeks opportunities to listen to the spiritual experience of other religions. We could say that all religions aim to penetrate the profound meaning of human existence by linking it to an origin or principle outside itself. Religions offer an attempt to understand the cosmos as coming from and returning to this origin or principle. Christians believe that God has revealed this origin and principle in Jesus, whom the Bible refers to as the "Alpha and Omega" (cf. Rev 1:8; 22:1).

My dear friends, I have come to Australia as an ambassador of peace. For this reason, I feel blessed to meet you who likewise share this yearning and the desire to help the world attain it. Our quest for peace goes hand in hand with our search for meaning, for it is in discovering the truth that we find the sure road to peace (cf. Message for World Day of Peace, 2006). Our effort to bring about reconciliation between peoples

springs from, and is directed to, that truth which gives purpose to life. Religion offers peace, but more importantly, it arouses within the human spirit a thirst for truth and a hunger for virtue. May we encourage everyone - especially the young - to marvel at the beauty of life, to seek its ultimate meaning, and to strive to realize its sublime potential!

With these sentiments of respect and encouragement, I commend you to the providence of Almighty God, and I assure you of my prayers for you and your loved ones, the members of your communities, and all the citizens of Australia.

Chapter Hall, St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney
18th July, 2008

RABBI JEREMY LAWRENCE'S WELCOME TO POPE BENEDICT XVI

Your Holiness Pope Benedict XVI
Our host, his Eminence Cardinal Pell
Your eminences & reverend brethren.

Shalom.

It is my great pleasure and a great honour to welcome you to Sydney on behalf of the Australian Jewish community.

With me, I am delighted to present our elected federal and state lay leaders, Robert Goot and David Knoll, senior clerical colleagues, Rabbi Jeffery Kamins & Rabbi Zalman Kastel; our executive leaders, Josie Lacey and John Landerer, and our youth representatives, Judith Levitan, and Josh Levin.

Ours is a historic community, which can trace its origins to individuals who arrived in Sydney in 1788 on the First Fleet. Ours is a community which has enjoyed unbroken acceptance and equality from those initial days. Our community has flourished under the opportunities this beautiful country has afforded it. Our community has been proud to serve Australia. It has seen Jewish Governors General, distinguished law officers, leaders of education, welfare, medicine and philanthropy.

For some weeks, I have been asked from all quarters what it means to participate in this historic event. There is of course, delight, in any encounter with a person of great stature, who has devoted so much of his life to the spiritual enrichment of our world.

On a personal level, I am bound to reflect that my grandparents, who were born in Berlin had to flee from there, just 70 years ago. Their parents, grandparents and siblings perished.

When I am asked what it means for me to participate in this historic event, my very first reaction is that for them, and for their generation, such an encounter as today's would have been unthinkable; it would be quite beyond their imagination.

So here we are in what is a different world, and in this respect a better world. It is a world which has become enriched and improved to a great part through the endeavours and enterprises of you and your worthy predecessors at the Vatican.

We recall, in particular, the humanity and wisdom of Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II. We reflect upon the landmark of Nostra Aetate, whose 40th anniversary we celebrated in October 2005 at my synagogue, The Great Synagogue, just across the park. It was our pleasure, then, to host a number of your distinguished Cardinals, amongst them, Cardinal Cassidy, whose

personal contribution to interfaith work, and whose excellent relations with our Jewish community have helped to chart these new, positive, fraternal paths.

We recall, too, the significant acknowledgement by your predecessor, that anti-Semitism is a sin, with no place in Catholicism, no place in civilisation. We welcome his endorsement, that "at all levels of Christian instruction and education" be it teaching, preaching or dramatisation "Catholic teaching. . . presents Jews and Judaism... in an honest and objective manner, free from prejudices and without any offences... an awareness of our common heritage" to "uproot the remains of anti-Semitism amongst the faithful."

Your Holiness,

Our Jewish liturgy contains blessings for seeing powerful leaders and great scholars – shenatan michvodo uchochmato levasar vedam – We bless God, who has imparted of his glory and his wisdom to flesh and blood.

What do we mean, he has imparted of His glory?

When God gives of His glory and His wisdom, it is no empty gift. God's glory and wisdom are purposeful and focused; they are a mandate, a charge. Though entrusted to us, they should remain His wisdom and His Glory. They are perceived and worthy of blessing when they are applied for the betterment of humanity and of His world.

Your Holiness, such is our welcome and blessing. That you may continue to illuminate humankind in the love of their fellows, their brothers, their sisters and love of God. That through such encounters as these, the positives of faith are emphasised over the disagreements. Our shared concerns for the environment, for the preservation of our climate and biodiversity... Our reverence for the sanctity of life, for the dignity of humankind in the home and in the workplace; for social justice, freedom from oppression, discrimination or persecution...

Our faiths teach that we are all children of one body cast in God's image. Our two faiths revere that moment almost 3,500 years ago, when the people of Israel heard the voice of God at Sinai. There, he entrusted us with the mission and the message of holy living and the celebration of God in all aspects of our lives and to share it with our world.

Though we may differ profoundly in the details or interpretations, our shared points of origin should bind us together with an amity which is greater than the discord from our point of departure and our points of disagreement.

Your Holiness,
Faith is a teacher, a healer and a well-spring of peace.

The Catholic community's celebration of World Youth Day, the magnificent program and enthusiastic participation by so many, highlights the continuing significance of faith in our world and among its youth. They have come in their hundreds of thousands to be close to you. They shall leave, richer and wiser, infused with the messages you impart.

Today's encounter reflects your Holiness' commitment to our ongoing dialogue. It is my prayer that its witnesses will learn from it, not only that faith is alive and is relevant and that it wears many robes... May they also learn from you, that faith is about respect for the humanity in us all, respect for the soul with which God has endowed each one of us; that we are each born the image of God, whatever creed, whatever colour...

Our Scriptures elaborate on our love for our fellows, our neighbours and the stranger. Our world is shrinking and draws us all closer. For the sake of humanity, we must turn the strangers into our neighbours and our neighbours into our friends.

We must celebrate the pioneers and the programs, who bring children of different backgrounds together to embark on shared projects of care and welfare; in the classroom, the Sunday school and the youth

movements; who turn stereotypes of Jews, Christians and Moslems into human beings into friends and partners in a shared global village. We must follow their example, turn discussion into deed, ideas into action, together for humanity.

In the words of Deuteronomy, Baruch atah bevoecha - May the Almighty bless your coming here – for raising the spiritual profile of our city and awareness of faith in our society. Uvaruch atah betzaytecha – may you be blessed upon your departure, to return to your home in health. There, may you continue your dialogue with our religious leadership, with the rabbis and scholars who have facilitated the last four decades of rapprochement.

When our time comes and our souls meet the souls of those who came before; I think of my grandparents and great-grandparents... They will see that we were fortunate to live in better times than they. May they also see as our legacy that we have made our world an even better world for our children and all God's children; and that through our endeavours we have made God's name greater for all humanity.

On behalf of the Jewish community, it is my honour and my pleasure, to welcome you to Sydney.

Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence
Senior Rabbi, The Great Synagogue, Sydney
Chapter Hall, St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, 18 July 2008

SHEIKH MOHAMADU SALEEM'S WELCOME TO POPE BENEDICT XVI

Your Holiness, the most respected Pope Benedict XVI, the most respected Cardinals and Bishops, Venerated Clergies of all religions and faith communities, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The Muslim community in Australia is delighted to welcome Your Holiness to our shores with the greeting of Almighty God and his prophets.

'Assalamualaikum' which means 'Peace be with you'. Last week I had the privilege to participate at an Interfaith peace ceremony" at Federation square in Melbourne that was held in conjunction with World Youth Day 2008 pilgrimage.

I was honoured to accept an "olive plant" from a young Christian student. The Olive tree will be planted in the court yard of "Virgin Mary Masjid" in Melbourne's west. This symbolism is significant for all –especially the youth today – to understand and appreciate that peace is one of the noblest ideals in Islam. Islam itself connotes 'peace through submission to God'. It is incumbent upon the Muslim to strive for peace.

However, peace is only possible through justice. In the words of the Prophet Isaiah (Jesus) (Peace be upon him), 'Justice is the condition for Peace.'

In Islam too justice is fundamental. The Qur'an calls upon humankind to uphold justice whatever the costs and consequences for the individual or his family.

It says in chapter 4 verse 135, "O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be against rich or poor: for God can best protect both. Follow not the lusts

of your hearts, swerve you from justice, and if ye distort justice or decline to do justice, verily God is well-acquainted with all that ye do."

Christians and Muslims – in particular the youth - are working together with people of other faith communities for justice and peace in many parts of the world.

Here in Australia, for instance, Christians and Muslims share many common concerns which have brought them together on issues, such as the protection of the environment, HIV –AIDS, helping the victims of natural disasters and many more. Of course, there is much more that we can do together to strengthen the bond between these two communities and others.

The Muslim community of Australia is very grateful for this opportunity to welcome Your Respectful Eminence. It is our hope that dialogue between these two religions and other faith communities be not only possible, but a reality.

Forging ties with people of other faiths, and with the larger society, is very much in line with Islamic teachings and the spirit of Islamic civilization.

Centuries ago, in Andalusia (Muslim Spain), in various parts of both East and West Africa, in Central Asia, in South Asia and in Southeast Asia, Muslims interacted with Christians, Jews, Buddhists and Hindus.

They accepted and respected religious diversity. Muslim scholars like Al-Biruni in the 11th century studied other religions with sympathy, while Al-Shahristani in the 12th century authored an encyclopedia of religions.

Muslims should become more inclusive and universal in their understanding of their religion. At the same time, significant segments of the Christian and other religious communities should overcome their misconceptions and prejudices of Islam and Muslims.

If Muslims, Christians and other faith communities reach out to one another and build bridges rather than erect barriers, the whole of humanity will rejoice forever!

For the past few days we listen to the youth saying "Let us promote fundamentalism of love, instead of fundamentalism of hatred".

My greatest hope is "May Your Respectful Holiness be the inspiration of love, justice and peace" for the half a million youth who have congregated here to celebrate their faith with Your Holiness, and many more millions all over the world.

I wish Your Respectful Holiness a peaceful and pleasant stay here in Australia and safe journey home. Thank you.

Sheikh Mohamadu Saleem
Executive Member Council of Imams.
Friday 18th July 2008,
Chapter Hall, St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney

AUSTRALIANS ALL, FACE TO FACE & FAITH TO FAITH: MULTI-FAITH SOCIETIES HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

On 17 July, during WYD an Interreligious Forum was held where young people of other faiths participated and Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald (Apostolic Nuncio to Cairo and former President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue) was the Keynote speaker. Below is his talk.

Teasing out the Title

The theme for our meeting this evening has a rather complicated title. It is worth trying to tease out all its elements and see what we are supposed to be talking about.

Australians All

Well, perhaps not all! I am sure there are many here this evening who, like myself, are not in fact Australians. Yet Australia is a very welcoming country, so many people of different nationalities and traditions are included under the Australian banner. In fact, what we are principally concerned with this evening is Australian society, and how people of different traditions can live in harmony within that society.

Face to face. This is a good reminder that we are really concerned with people, not with abstractions. We must always remember that we never meet people of other religions in general, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs or followers of Aboriginal Spirituality, but rather we encounter specific persons, persons with a face and a distinctive name: Aaron, Andrew, Aisha, Anand, Agnivesh, Anjit, Alice. We must meet them as they are, not as we think they ought to be.

Yet let us not fall into the error of Margaret Thatcher who said famously: "There is no such thing as society". We cannot say that there is no such thing as religions, that religions do not exist. They do, with their doctrines that have been developed over centuries, with their rites and practices that have been handed down, with their wisdom, moral teaching and particular world views, with their structures, whether these be elaborate and hierarchical or somewhat simple and flexible. Individuals are marked by the religion to which they belong, or in which they have been brought up. This is why our title adds *Faith to Faith*, bringing in the collective dimension in interreligious encounters. This means that when we meet Ali or Aisha, we cannot ignore their belonging to Islam since this has probably shaped their outlook and attitudes. Nor is it a question only of individuals, since whole societies have been influenced by religious traditions. This is why people today talk of a possible

clash of civilisations or, to counteract this, an *alliance of civilisations*.

Religions do not exist in isolation. Particularly in today's world, with its greater mobility, people belonging to different religions live in the same areas and necessarily come into contact with one another. We live in *multi-faith societies*. This is a simple fact of which you, here in Australia, especially people living in the larger cities, are very aware.

The question before us, however, is what does it mean to live in multi-faith societies, or as our theme puts it, are we *heading in the right direction*? Before suggesting some pointers towards possible answers to that question, let me be more concrete by sharing some experience, some consideration from Cairo.

Considerations from Cairo

I have come to Australia from Cairo where I have been living for the last two years. It is an immense city with about 18 million inhabitants (out of a total population in Egypt of around 78 million). Christians make up perhaps 10% of the population. There are obviously a great number of mosques in the city, but one also sees numerous churches. Christianity has survived the long centuries of Islamic domination. The official line is that Christians and Muslims form one people, all equal, yet there are often tensions due to the growing islamization of society. I would say that Christians and Muslims tend to live side by side, rather than face to face, and among those who emigrate, as here to Australia, Christians would be proportionately more numerous than Muslims.

As a society, Cairo is bi-religious, rather than multi-faith. There is a tiny remnant of the formerly important Jewish community, but no communities of Buddhists, Hindus or Sikhs. Perhaps this lack of variety only tends to exasperate the tensions, making relations more difficult. Multi-cultural societies may in fact provide greater opportunities.

Models of Multi-culturalism

Multi-culturalism, of which my country of origin, the United Kingdom, boasted, and of which the city of Melbourne, here in Australia, is frequently given as an example, has suddenly become almost a dirty word. Political leaders are accused of having favoured separate development, thus creating ghettos where

people belonging to a particular religion live in a world of their own, having little communication with the rest of society, or having turned against that society. Politicians are blamed for not having built up structures which would have helped people to acquire a new identity, a sense of belonging and loyalty to the host country. The activities of religious groups, when they become more organized, are treated with suspicion. In the United Kingdom the opening of new “faith schools” is often opposed. This is particularly true in the case of Muslims who have suffered the consequences of the events of 9/11 (11 September 2001).

Stricter rules for immigration are being introduced, especially in Europe. Higher qualifications are being demanded of prospective immigrants. Fewer facilities are granted for the reunification of families. Those who arrive without the proper documentation are being sent back to their own countries. All these restrictions are in fact making the formation of multi-cultural societies more difficult.

I would like to bring in here a consideration put forward by Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth. In his book *The Persistence of Faith. Religion, Morality and Society in a Secular Age* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), he suggests that we can only attain to the universal through the particular (I learn to care for people through the caring relationship experienced in my own family). Applied to the interfaith context, this means that people have to be as it were religiously bi-lingual. They have to know the language of their own tradition, but at the same time have an ability to communicate with people of other religions.

This has implications for education. Children need, and have a right to, instruction in their own faith tradition. At the same time they should be helped to acquire some knowledge of the other faith traditions found in the multi-cultural society. This widening of knowledge is indeed a duty of all members of society, though care has to be taken not to fall into religious indifference, as if this would make interfaith relations easier. The case is just the opposite. The fact of being rooted in one’s own tradition allows for greater openness to others, and this makes it possible to develop a “community of communities”. All this, of course, supposes quite a high degree of trust, allowing communities to develop in the way they deem appropriate, but at the same time encouraging cross-communication.

Developing Direction

Religious encounter is between individuals, not systems, which is what has been indicated by *face to face*. There is room and need for conversation and exchange at all levels: among experts, but also in the neighbourhood, among women, among youth. Such meetings can be bi-lateral: Jewish-Christian, Christian-Muslim, Christian-Buddhist, etc, but also tri-lateral: Jewish-Christian-Muslim, or multi-lateral. Each type has its own advantages.

The topics for exchange are almost unlimited. They can range from questions of daily life - up-bringing and education of children, care for the elderly, attitudes towards sickness and death -, to spiritual topics - the

importance of prayer, the way of celebrating feasts -, to social problems – racial and religious discrimination, justice issues, respect for the environment, bioethical questions -, to an exploration of commonalities and differences in the beliefs and practices of the respective religions (in this case particularly a great deal of mutual confidence is needed so that difficult questions can be tackled in a non-polemical spirit).

Yet *face to face* is not the only possible position to adopt. There is room and need also for people of different religions to *face together* in the same direction. By this I mean that the discussion of shared problems can lead to common action. Such action may be very local: setting up a play-group for children, organising a car pool, initiating various youth activities. It may take the form of common involvement in actions concerning fair trade, or in pro-life issues. This is often called the *dialogue of action*, and it is truly a form of dialogue since there is a need to determine together what one wants to achieve, the appropriate means to attain the goal that has been set, and how responsibilities are to be shared.

There is an opportunity here for using imagination. I have seen choirs composed of Christians and Muslims, and even young Palestinians and Israelis. Music can indeed help people to transcend boundaries. Sport is another way of bringing people together. You may have heard of the Run4Unity, a relay of events for children of all religions, organized by the Focolare movement right across the world on 10 May. Art, theatre, fashion, cuisine – there are so many areas where people of different traditions can contribute. You may object that there is nothing religious in all this, but bringing people belonging to different religions to cooperate together, to face in the same direction, is already an achievement. It is a step towards that peace and harmony which the true goal of interfaith dialogue.

Seeking Success

A final reflection or rather a warning: in interfaith dialogue one should not be in a hurry to see results. It takes time to break down prejudices, to overcome suspicion. There may be breakdowns in communication, so that the same things have to be explained over and over again, and one may have to be ready to start all over from scratch. There is a need for persistence, perseverance, but confidence too that the fruits will come. I would say that there is need of a contemplative spirit, an ability to discover and admire what God is doing in the hearts of individuals, to appreciate all that is good, true and beautiful in the different religious traditions. All this can be attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit who is the focus of this World Youth Day.

This leads me to conclude these opening remarks with a quotation from a document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (*Dialogue and Mission* 24):

The Spirit both anticipates and accompanies the path of the Church which, nevertheless, feels itself impelled to discern the signs of his presence, to follow him wherever he leads and to serve him as a humble and discreet collaborator.

+ Michael L. Fitzgerald, M.Afr.
Darling Harbour, Sydney, 17 July 2008

Pope meets Interfaith leaders

On 18th July, during the World Youth Day, Pope Benedict XVI had an interfaith meeting with 40 religious representatives (including Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and Zoroastrians) as well as Christians who work in interfaith relations. Sr Pauline Rae was one of the Christian participants who were presented to the Pope and received a Papal Medallion to commemorate the occasion.

The Imam and the Pastor

On the evening of 18th July, the Centre hosted the screening of "The Imam and the Pastor" at Darling Harbour. The respondents to the documentary were Imam Afroz Ali, Rev Dr Shane Clifton and two young women – Jeena Joyan (Muslim) and Katie Homsy (Christian). A good number of people attended the event and had very lively discussion. Fr Patrick McInerney from the Centre was the MC for the evening.

Magis Interfaith Experiment

The Magis Interfaith Experiment was held from July 6-11. The Magis was a Jesuit programme for the WYD pilgrims which included different activities in small groups. Sr Suporna Rozario ssm from the Centre and Fr Herman Roborgh SJ coordinated the interfaith week. There were 25 pilgrims from Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar, Germany, Belgium, Lithuania, US, New Zealand and Australia. The interfaith week included visiting places of worship of other religions including Auburn Gallipoli Mosque, Jewish Museum and Synagogue, Buddhist Centre, Hindu Vedanta Centre, Murgan Hindu Temple and the Sikh Temple at Glenwood and meeting young people of different faiths. The pilgrims were very interested to learn about other faiths and to dialogue with young people. It was a first-time experience for most as they had not visited such places or met people of other faiths before. They were amazed to learn of the commonalities as well as the differences that Christianity shares with other religions. They had interesting discussions with their peers of other faiths on the role of religion and the importance of interreligious dialogue in today's world.

BOOK REVIEW

Did YOU Know? Refuting Rigid Interpretations Concerning the Position of Women in Islam and Muslims' Interactions with Non-Muslims

By Aziza Abdel-Halim AM (Northmead, NSW: A. Abdel-Halim, 2008)

Aziza Abdel-Halim was born in Egypt and migrated to Australia in the early seventies. She is founder and President of the Muslim Women's National Network of Australia (MWNNA). She is a prominent Muslim woman in Australia who is often asked to comment on Islamic issues by Australian government agencies and the media. She was awarded membership of the Order of Australia for her outstanding work in education and working with Muslim women.

Did YOU Know? Refuting Rigid Interpretations Concerning the Position of Women in Islam and Muslims' Interactions with Non-Muslims refutes some common misconceptions about women in Islam. The author looks critically at Islamic traditional practice and its implications regarding the position of women.

The book is divided into seven parts: The author begins with the meaning of Islam and its main sources which are the Qur'an and the Sunnah, Sirah, and Hadith.

In Part two, the author talks about the contribution of women in Islam from which she drew the title of the book *Did You Know?* This part contains the bulk of her writing. "The Islamic concept of creation is 'of pairs'. Men and women were created to complement each other's role in life" (P12). They have equal rights according to the Qur'an. The author presents a list of very significant women in the history of Islam – women whose lives express this equality and complementarity.

The author then addresses the interaction between Muslims and Non-Muslims. "It is the duty of every Muslim to be considerate, kind, friendly and caring of his/her neighbours whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims (p. 87). Throughout history Muslims interacted with non-Muslims and today is no different.

The author points out some contemporary influential Islamic thinkers, including women, who have contributed a great deal to the understanding of Islam in recent years: Dr Jamal Al Faruqi, USA; Dr Chandra Muzaffar, Malaysia; Professor Abdullah Saeed, Australia; Dr Leila Ahmed, Egypt/USA; Zeenath Kauthar, India/Malaysia and Dr Fatima Mernissi, Morocco.

In the last two sections, the author speaks of Muslims in Australia and their contribution to Australian society. She provides a clear timeline of Muslims in Australia (pp. 126-130). The first Muslims to come to Australia came in the early 1700s as traders. Today Australian Muslims come from over 70 countries and over one third of the Muslim population is Australian-born. Muslim women contribute in their own communities as well as in the wider society in many areas such as education, law, medicine etc. "Muslim women in Australia are everywhere, in every respected profession" (137). There is a helpful glossary and lists of resources at the end.

Did You Know? is a short and easy to read book. It is clear and informative. It will help in understanding the position of women in Islam and overcoming some of the misconceptions that exist. The book is as beneficial to Muslims (women and men) as it is for others, especially those who are involved in interreligious dialogue. It will stimulate interest to read and become more informed about Islam especially as it is lived in Australia.

September

- 1 Ramadan (Muslim Fast) begins.
- 13 Seminar: Interreligious Dialogue at the Institute for Mission, 1-5 Marian St, Blacktown from 9.30am -3.30pm. For more info and registration contact Lorraine Murphy (02) 9871 7293, email ecumenism@parra.catholic.org.au

October

- 1 Eid – al Fitr (Ending of Muslim fast)
- 19 **7th International Interreligious Abraham Conference: “Walking Together – Our Faiths & Reconciliation”**
Keynote Address: Prof Larissa Behrendt, UTS.
Speakers: Assoc Prof Ismail Albayrak ACU, Melbourne, (Muslim).
 Assoc Prof Gerard Hall, ACU, Brisbane (Christian).
 Justice Stephen Rothman AM, Justice, Supreme Court, NSW, (Jewish).
Time: 11.00 am – 3.30 pm
Venue: Webster Theatre, University of Sydney, City Rd, Camperdown.
Cost: \$20 (Inc. Lunch & Afternoon Tea).

November

Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye (*The Imam & The Pastor*) will be visiting Australia. They will be speaking:
13 Nov at Bowman Hall, Blacktown at 7pm

14 Nov at Australia Catholic University, Strathfield (to be confirmed). For details and further information contact Sr Pauline Rae, Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations, (02) 9352 8011, Email cmr.cmi@columban.org.au

A Certificate Course in Ecumenics and Interreligious Dialogue

The course consists of four units:
 1. Interreligious Dialogue; 2. History and Theology of Ecumenism; 3. Church: a Community of Believers (2 Units)
When: Saturdays (9.30am-3.30pm, also some evenings)
Where: Institute for Mission, 1-5 Marion St, Blacktown, NSW.
Who: This certificate is open to those who want to learn more about Ecumenics and Interfaith Dialogue. No previous study is required. The course is open to Christians of all denominations and to people of all faiths.
 Further enquiries: The Director, Institute for Mission Ph (02) 9831 4911, email: ifm@tpq.com.au
Web: www.instituteformission.com.au

A Graduate Certificate in Interfaith Relations

The Young Catholic Women's Interfaith Fellowship is being offered to women aged mid 20's – mid 30's to pursue a Graduate Certificate in Interfaith Relations at ACU Canberra, Feb-May 2009. The Fellowship is available to women with experience, interest and/or capacity for leadership in ecumenical or interfaith relations. For further information contact Sr Ruth Durick, Tel: (02) 6201 9864 or (02) 6201 9867
 Email: fellowship.opw@catholic.org.au
 Web: www.opw.catholic.org.au

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