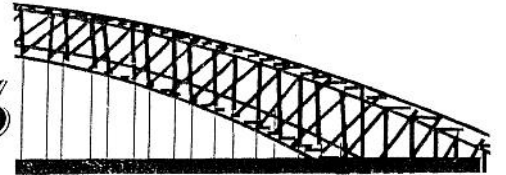


BRIDGES



A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM NETWORK

Sponsored by the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations

Number 25

Editorial

□ This issue of *Bridges* celebrates the contribution of young people to interfaith relations. The article and photos will tell the story. Already some of these young people have been asked by a variety of groups from the three faiths involved to share their experience and to offer their ideas on the way forward in interfaith relations. It is a heartening development.

Pauline Rae smsm
Editor



Bridges

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Banning Headscarves: A Wrong Approach:

Commenting on the decision of French President, Jacques Chirac, on calling for a ban on Muslim headscarves, large crucifixes or crosses and the Jewish kippa, Dr Chandra Muzaffar of Malaysia wrote: For religious freedom, including the right of a person to express his or her religious identity in a manner he or she deems appropriate is integral to the secular notion of human rights. Of course in exercising this right a person should observe one other principle which is essential to the secular perspective on liberty: the use of the headscarf or any other religious symbol should not impinge upon the rights of the other. ... Though I do not regard the headscarf as *the* ultimate manifestation of female modesty – the Holy Quran has a more profound understanding of modesty – I would nonetheless defend the right of a Muslim woman to wear a scarf just as I would defend her right not to wear the scarf. Such a position is not only consistent with the spirit of the Quran which emphasises substance over form, but it is also in harmony with fundamental secular human rights. ... Apart from an appraisal of actual policies and programmes that impact upon the community, it calls for a thorough re-examination of certain dominant attitudes exhibited by both the majority and the minority which appear to have contributed to the widening chasm between the two. In other words, social education aimed at overcoming deep-seated prejudices and stereotypes should be the priority focus of both State and society at this point in time. *Just Commentary* January 2004

In Pakistan, Muslim and Christian Students Fast Together

At St Lawrence Catholic School, Lahore, even Muslims fast for Lent – at least for a day. It is part of a reciprocal program. Last year Christian pupils after fasting for a day, joined Muslim pupils in breaking the Ramadan fast with a meal of friendship. And, recently during this season of Lent, the Muslim pupils decided to have a day of fasting with the Catholic friends and to share a meal of breaking the fast, in a climate of brotherhood. Speaking at a students meeting on behalf of the Muslim pupils, Azam Khan said he hoped that the Lenten season of prayer and fasting for believers in Christ will promote peace and harmony in Pakistan and all over the world. "Our dream is to send a message of peace and reconciliation to all peoples," Khan added.

Tariq Faiza, representing the Christian pupils, said that the initiative taken by the Muslims was most appreciated and he said that St Lawrence's Christian pupils want to continue to work side by side with the Muslims to "build a country which is tolerant, liberal." *Zenit* 10 March 2004

Jerusalem Women's Interfaith Encounter.

Each month this group of women meets to share their journey of trying to create peace between religions. In January the topic was "Experiences of Forgiveness" which had been studied from the point of view of Islam,

Christianity and Judaism the previous month. From this background women shared their personal experience of forgiveness. The courage exhibited by each speaker in telling of facing the challenge of forgiveness, and even of being unable to forgive, acted as a further catalyst to fostering understanding relationships. In the written evaluations afterwards one half of the women wrote that they learned something new about their own religion. More than half wrote that they learned something new about other religions. EVERYONE wrote that they changed their feelings or opinions about women of other religions.

Coming Events

Please note in your diary:

29-30 MAY 2004

THIRD INTERNATIONAL INTERFAITH DIALOGUE CONFERENCE

For further information: Contact the Centre for
Christian-Muslim Relations:
Phone 94888844
Email: paulinemrae@hotmail.com
inter-faith@accsoft.com.au

APRIL 17 2004 – 9.00AM TO 5.00PM Towards Understanding the Church in China Today

A one-day conference to explore ways to promote
communion between the churches in China and
Australia.
Cost \$20.00 [includes lunch]
Student concession: \$15.00
Venue: Australian Catholic University, Strathfield

The Ramakrishna Sarada Vedanta Society,
led by Rev. Mataji Pravrajika Ajayaprana will host
**The Spirit of Women – An Interfaith Forum:
An afternoon dedicated to further interfaith
sharing between women**
Further information: 9745 4320
anet@compassnet.com.au
Venue: Australian Catholic University, Strathfield
[To be confirmed]

Recent Events

TRISH MADIGAN *op*, staff member of the Centre for
Christian-Muslim Relations, presented a paper entitled:
"The 'threat' of fundamentalism? Some Christian and
Muslim perspectives" at the recent "*Peaceworks*"
Conference of Women Scholars of Religion and Theology
held in Melbourne. The paper expressed the view that
claims that there is today a "clash of civilizations"
between Islamic and Western societies does not
adequately take into account the reality of past centuries
of mutually beneficial cultural interchange between
Muslims and Christians. The phenomenon of Islamic

[Continued on Page 4

Young Adults Participate in Interfaith Journey of



Thirty young Australian Muslims, Christians and Jews (aged between 18 and 25) have undertaken a unique experiment, not only sharing something of their particular faiths, but also living, eating and sharing a week of their lives together. They spent six days, based residentially at Elanora Heights Conference Centre in Sydney (Jan 29 – Feb 4, 2004) exploring a variety of contemporary issues in religious and secular Australia today. Included in the programme were visits to places of worship, opportunities to meet people from a wide range of religious and ethnic backgrounds, encounters with media, business and community projects, and dialogue with Aboriginal spirituality.

They were participating in the Journey of Promise project, developed jointly by the National Council of Churches in Australia, the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, as part of the National Dialogue between the three faiths. The project was supported by the Australian Government's *Living in Harmony* initiative and was planned to offer a model of how Jews, Muslims and Christians can celebrate their differences and rejoice in the similarities that they have together.

To prepare themselves for the week long intensive program the young participants attended gatherings at three major faith occasions – the Eid Ul-Fitr celebration at the Zetland mosque (25 Nov 2003); Chanukkah with the Jewish community at the Great Synagogue (21 Dec 2003) and Christmas celebration at the Armenian Orthodox Church in Chatswood (6 Jan 2004). Recognising the first people to live in spiritual harmony with and in the land now known as Australia, participants also attended the Yabun Concert for Survival Day at Redfern Park on Australia Day (26 Jan 2004). The final event of the Journey is a celebration on Harmony Day (Sunday 21 March) planned by the young people themselves.

The aims of the Journey were

- ♦ to enable an in-depth relationship between a representative cross-section of Christian, Muslim and Jewish young people in Sydney
- ♦ to empower young Muslims, Jews and Christians to celebrate their common ground and to value their differences and the diversity of others

- ♦ to explore the interface of faith, culture and society in relation to key aspects and issues of contemporary Australia
- ♦ to enable young Jews, Christians and Muslims to express their hopes and concerns for the future together in Australia
- ♦ to share a model of inter-faith and cross-cultural dialogue with the wider Australian community

Reflecting on the meaning of the project the Program Co-ordinator, Rev Dr Jon Inkpin from the National Council of Churches said "Firstly, this was an Australian journey, arising specifically out of our Australian National Dialogue which has been meeting over the past two years. The *Journey of Promise* enabled a new step to be taken in broadening that Dialogue as young Jews, Muslims and Christians have taken us forward into a deeper path of understanding. Like our common father Abraham, to some extent we began a journey into the unknown. In undertaking our *Journey of Promise* we acknowledged the traditional owners and custodians of this land, and their care and stewardship of this land for so many thousands of years. Despite the tragic sins of our history, there is something particularly Australian about journeying towards a new promise. Indigenous stories and Indigenous experience have been a central part of our time together.



"Secondly, we began this *Journey of Promise* in the search for greater peace and harmony in our nation and our world. Religion we know has frequently been used as a justification for oppressing, and even destroying, others. *Each* of our religious faiths has been used, and is still sometimes used, as a tool of violence, rather than a means of peace. Yet at the *heart* of *each* of our great faiths there is in the vision of, and call to, God's peace. Each of our great religions therefore has something to teach the world about how we may find and nurture that larger peace: not just tolerating, but truly *valuing* our different religious identities, and *celebrating* our different positive insights into God.

"Finally, and most importantly of all, we began *this Journey of Promise* not just because we wanted to discover what Australia is and can be, and what peace is, or can be. We began this journey to discover more about ourselves and our beliefs..."

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Book Review

Hagen Berndt, *Non-Violence in the World's Religions*, Translated from German original *Gewaltfreiheit in den Weltreligionen, Vision und Wirklichkeit* by John Bowden. London, SCM Press, 2000. 175 pp.

In this decade dedicated to Active non-Violence, this small book is a welcome contribution to the discussion. It is divided into two sections: Part I: Non-Violence in the Lives of Individuals – Portraits and Part II: An A-Z of Non-Violence. The author deals with five world religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Within Part I, he has managed to present 27 short portraits of activists for non-violence. Many of the names are well known, others less well known, and a sampling include Martin Buber, Desmond Tutu, Máiread Maguire, Farid Esack, Fatima Mernissi, Mahatma Gandhi and Aang San Suu Kyi. In spite of the conciseness of each portrait, Berndt has succeeded in highlighting the background, philosophy and involvement in non-violence of each person treated.

Part II does not strictly adhere alphabetically to its name as “A – Z”. It does succeed in treating of issues that concern our world today among them “Civil disobedience and non-violent resistance”, “Environment and justice”, “Economics and social justice”, “Prison”, “War and peace”, “Women and men”, “Upbringing and education” and “Reconciliation”. The discussion on each topic is highlighted by the ways in which the contribution of still more activists have contributed to non-violence.

This book will offer much information on issues related to the title. Perhaps once read, it may be found well worthwhile to recommend to others

Kathleen Collins ssps

Items of Interest [cont. from Page 2]

fundamentalism in its more violent manifestations needs to be understood and addressed for what it really is - a cry to the world community to address serious questions of political, economic and social inequity affecting a broad range of countries of the Muslim world. A real danger is that if traditional religious heritages, both Christian and Muslim, are not able to be brought into interaction in a positive and productive way with new cultural, social and political realities they will become, and will remain, irrelevant to the future of a developing and evolving world.

SR PAULINE RAE (*Convenor and Editor*) was guest speaker at the 2003 Women's Forum conducted by the Muslim Women's National Network of Australia and the RISEAP Women's Movement [from S-E Asia]. Pauline spoke to the theme of the forum “More in Common than You Think”. In appreciation of all she has done to facilitate good relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, the MWNNA presented her with a plaque recording her “Outstanding and Pioneering Work” in this area.

From the 11th – 13th of February 2004 FR PATRICK MCINERNEY (*Staff member of the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations*) was an invited speaker when the University of Melbourne held an International Colloquium on “Managing Christian-Muslim Relations.” The specific focus was educational policy options for promoting interfaith harmony. The speakers came from Nigeria, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Australia and New Zealand. They presented more than 30 papers on the role of religious, educational, and community leaders in promoting better relations between the two communities, giving a flavour of the progress and issues being faced in each country. Fr Patrick McInerney presented a paper evaluating the joint Christian-Muslim Peace Forums being conducted by the Columban Centres for Peace, Ecology & Justice and Christian-Muslim Relations in partnership with Local Councils in Sydney.

Young Adults Participate in Interfaith “Journey of Promise” [cont. from Page 3]

Feedback from the young participants during the course of the program showed their appreciation:

After attending Christmas celebrations in the Armenian Orthodox Church one participant said: “Having only been to churches for weddings I really had no idea what to expect. I enjoyed watching the ceremony and all of its unique steps. I especially enjoyed listening to the choir and found the use of chanting and singing very interesting. I guess the sombre mood was quite unexpected as (in my ignorance) I had only associated Christmas with joy and happiness. However the Orthodox Christmas educated me in other messages of Christmas”.

A Christian reflected: “Today I attended the end of Ramadan prayers at the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils. The experience was new and amazing. New and amazing because it was so foreign for one coming from a Pentecostal background, revealing because we were given the opportunity to see a community of faith celebrating one of their happiest and holy festivals”.

Another responded “For a practicing Catholic attending the Channukah celebration at the Great Synagogue was such an overwhelming experience, and gave me a real sense of participation in our shared Abrahamic heritage. I enjoyed the sense of festivity with upbeat and catchy music and great food. In future Channukah won't be just another religious festival, but something I can engage in and relate to. So Shalom! Happy Channukah!”

Photos and more information about the Journey of Promise, can be found on the NCCA website (www.ncca.org.au). A video is being produced to enable the Journey to be shared with others.

*Irish Madigan of
(Christian mentor for Journey of Promise)*

MESSAGE FOR THE END OF RAMADAN, 2003

Constructing Peace Today

Dear Muslim Friends

1. The time of Ramadan comes round again, and it is my pleasure to greet you on this occasion and to offer you my very best wishes. During this special month the communal meal, *iftar*, which breaks the fast at the end of the day, brings family members and friends together in an atmosphere of joy. Quite often people of other religions are invited to share in this moment of conviviality, and there is a growing custom of Christians organising an *iftar* for their Muslim friends. Such signs of friendship are appreciable, especially at this time when there is so much unrest and tension in the world. It is in this spirit of fraternity that I extend my greetings and those of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to all Muslims through the world, in particular on the occasion of *'Id al-Fitr*, the feast which concludes the month of Ramadan.
2. As has become customary with this annual message, I should like to share with you some reflections and it would seem appropriate to centre these on the need to construct peace. My starting point is a letter which Pope John XXIII addressed to all people of good will forty years ago, in 1963. In this letter, entitled *Pacem in Terris* "Peace on Earth", it was suggested that peace is an edifice resting on four pillars: Truth, Justice, Love and Freedom. Each of these values has to be present if there are to be good and harmonious relations between peoples and between nations.
3. *Truth* is the first pillar, for it includes the recognition that human beings are not their own master, but are called to fulfil the will of God, the Creator of all, who is the Absolute Truth. In human relations truth implies sincerity, essential to mutual confidence and fruitful dialogue leading to peace. Truth moreover brings each individual to acknowledge his or her own rights, but also to recognise his or her own duties towards others.
4. Yet peace cannot exist without *justice*, respect for the dignity and rights of each human person. It is the lack of justice, in individual, social and international relations, that causes so much unrest in our world today, and brings about violence.
5. Justice must nevertheless be tempered by *love*. This implies the ability to recognise that we all belong to one human family, and so to see our fellow human beings as our brothers and sisters. It gives the capacity to share in both sorrows and joys. It makes people feel the needs of others

as if they were one's own, and this empathy leads them to share their own gifts with others, not only material goods but also the values of mind and spirit. Love also makes allowances for weakness, and so includes the ability to forgive. This forgiveness is essential to the restoration of peace when conflict has broken out, for it opens up the possibility of beginning again, on a new basis, in a restored relationship.

6. All this supposes *freedom*, an essential characteristic of the human person. For freedom allows people to act according to reason and to assume responsibility for their own actions. In deed each of us is responsible before God for our contribution to society.
7. To these four pillars I would be inclined to add a fifth, namely *prayer*. For we know that, as human beings, we are weak. We find it hard to live up to these ideals. We need God's help, and this we have to implore humbly. Let me quote here some words of Pope John Paul II:

If peace is God's gift and has its source in him, where are we to seek it and how can we build it, if not in a deep and intimate relationship with God? To build the peace of order, justice and freedom requires, therefore, a priority commitment to prayer, which is openness, listening, dialogue and finally union with God, the prime wellspring of true peace.

(Address on the Day of Prayer for Peace, Assisi, 24 January 2002.)

The Pope went on to say that prayer is not a form of escapism. On the contrary, it allows us to face up to reality with a strength, which comes from God.

8. The month of Ramadan is not only a time of fasting, but also a period of intense prayer. I wish to assure you, my Muslim friends, that we are united with you in prayer to the Almighty and Merciful God. May He bless each one of you and all the members of your families. May this blessing be a source of comfort in particular for those who have suffered, or who are still suffering, on account of armed conflict. May the Good God give all of us the strength to be true constructors of peace.

With best wishes for a Blessed Feast, *'Id Mubarak*.

Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald
President
Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue