

The LANTERN SERIES

EVANGELISATION



Witnessing Christ in the World

No. 6

Interreligious Dialogue

Bridging the gulf of interreligious difference is a work of mission. While ignorance allows prejudice and intolerance to flourish, dialogue and learning foster mutual understanding and harmony. In the encounter with the faith of another, through God's grace, we allow God to reveal more of God's self to us. This issue of The Lantern focuses on positive stories and ideas about dialogue between people of different faiths.

"You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" John 4:9

Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs Proverbs 10:12

"Their faith will gain new dimensions as they discover the active presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ beyond the visible boundaries of the Church and the Christian fold."

Dialogue and Proclamation, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1991

Building Bridges

When I went to Pakistan as a Columban my first task was to learn the national language, Urdu, at a language school for missionaries. One of the senior teachers, highly respected by fellow teachers and students alike, was Mr Sultan Ahmad. He would regale us with stories from his youth, not only teaching us the language but also educating us about the culture and its people. Through the hospitality he extended to us and by welcoming us into his family, our relationship became not just one of teacher/student but also that of friend. What may astonish some people is that Mr Sultan was a devout Muslim dedicated to teaching Christian missionaries – and building bridges across our differences.

Columban priest, Patrick McInerney lived and worked in Pakistan for 20 years.



"... a true dialogue, (is) respectful of differences, courageous, patient and persevering which finds its strength in prayer."

Pope Benedict XVI, Feb 2007



Interfaith Journey of Promise

In February 2004, 30 young Australian Jews, Christians and Muslims spent six days together in Sydney, sharing their faith lives as part of a project called Journey of Promise. Its aim was to empower them to realize and celebrate their common ground, to value their differences and to express their hopes and concerns for their future together in Australia.

The project coordinator Rev Dr Jonathan Inkpin, reflecting on the meaning of the project, said: "At the heart of our great faiths there is the vision of and a call to God's peace. Each of our great religions, therefore, has something to teach the world."

The words of one participant best summed up the experience saying it "gave me a real sense of participation in our shared Abrahamic heritage."

Anglican Minister, Jonathan Inkpin is the General Secretary, NSW Ecumenical Council.

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Interreligious dialogue, one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century, according to Pope John Paul II, raises mixed feelings in people of all religions.

Some feel it is appropriate for religious leaders to meet and pray, but fail to see the relevance in the local community. This is unfortunate since in the words of the same Pope, "the parish represents the space for a meeting with people of various religious convictions and cultures ... the parish community can become a training ground of hospitality, a place where an exchange of experiences and gifts takes place." (Migration and Interreligious Dialogue, 2002)

Australian society is conscious of the underlying unease among people about things like "shared values" in a multicultural mix. Maintaining peaceful and harmonious communities with the introduction of different ethnic groups and religions gives rise to tensions.

While every religion will have some members who are against dialogue, the majority within these religions, and those who profess no religion, would accept the wisdom of promoting greater understanding and respect.

We need people of faith who are able to venture beyond the comfort zones of their parish, mosque, temple or synagogue and invite "others" to come and talk about their faith. We need them to take everyday opportunities at work or sport or shopping to chat awhile in order for our self imposed barriers to fall away. Jesus showed us the way when he talked to the Samaritan woman at the local meeting place, the well. Interreligious dialogue is not only for the Pope and other religious leaders, it is for all of us and together we can make a difference.

"We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" Acts 2: 11b,12

- **Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations** works towards closer relationships among the faith traditions, especially among Christians and Muslims, in line with church's teaching on inter-religious dialogue www.columban.org.au ph 02 8352 8000
- **Young Catholic Women's Interfaith Fellowship** Contact Ruth Durrick (02) 6201 9864 www.cacw.catholic.org.au
- **Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-religious Dialogue** Australian Catholic University. Contact Professor Raymond Canning (02)6201 9867.
- **The Assisi Decalogue** – www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_20020304_capi-stato_en.html

"I learnt so much about my own Catholic faith and that of other faith traditions. The importance of interfaith dialogue in our world today became evident..."

Michelle Palmada, Young Catholic Women's Interfaith Fellowship graduate 2007.

It is never too late to give up our prejudices.

Henry David Thoreau (1854)

Prayer

Creator God, open us to the seeds of your Spirit present in other faiths that surprise us when we truly dialogue with each other.

Chat Points:

- Discuss each of the four forms of dialogue: life, action, theological exchange, religious experience.
- Where/when have you experienced one or all of these with people of other faiths. What did you learn?
- Read the Assisi Decalogue. How can religions contribute to peace?

TAKE ACTION

- Meet the leaders of other churches and other faiths in your district.
- **Acknowledge each others' religious feast days – send a greeting or some food.**
- Share a meal with people of other faiths.
- Watch the media with a critical eye for stereotyping or discriminatory language.
- Do not remain silent when others make derogatory remarks about other ethnic or religious groups, but challenge them appropriately.

