



Bridges

Building relationships between
Christians and Muslims



No. 81 December 2018

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From the Editor

I attended the *Parliament of the World's Religions* held in Toronto from 1-7 November 2018. The word "parliament" comes from Old French, *parler* = to speak. It is good to speak, but one must first listen. Otherwise, there is no point in speaking. Listening opens us up to new insights, new understandings, new horizons. We discover that the other is our sister and brother.

When believers from different faiths share openly with each other, both are enriched. Each one grows in understanding of self, the other, the world, and God. This is what happened at the Parliament (see my report pp. 6-7). It is what we do in all our Centre activities (pp. 2-3). It is what we celebrate in good news stories from around the world; and deplore when the refusal to listen results in violence (pp. 4-5).

The people of Springfield USA have built interfaith relations for 40 years. Starting with sharing lunches, they grew in friendship, learned collaboration, and now recognise

Patrick McInerney

that "interfaith dialogue feeds the soul" (p. 6). Students attending the *Interfaith Leadership Institute* in Chicago learned that rather than speaking about doctrines, it is best to speak about personal experience (p. 9).

When we speak, we must be responsible for our words. The criminal act of a disturbed Muslim man wielding a knife in the Melbourne CBD does not justify associating his deranged acts with his religion or denigrating all his co-religionists. Some commentators use the word "Islamism" to denote the ideological perversion that masquerades as religion, preserving the words "Islam" and "Islamic" to refer to the religion followed by the world's 1.8 billion Muslims (p. 10). Let us speak well to, and of, each other; and let us listen deeply to each other.

Centre News

Bishop Vincent and Sheikh Mosaad at Parramatta Mosque

On Tuesday 2 October 2018 we introduced Bishop Vincent Long, Bishop of Parramatta, to Sheikh Mosaad Issa, the newly appointed Imam of the Parramatta Mosque. We felt it important that the local religious leaders of this city know each other and find ways of cooperating together on matters of common concern.

Seated at the back of the mosque, we witnessed the midday prayers. The Imam welcomed us from the pulpit and encouraged the congregation to do likewise. After the prayers, many greeted us very warmly and thanked us for visiting the mosque.

After formal introductions, we adjourned to an adjacent room for a light lunch. Over the meal the bishop and the imam shared their experiences of serving their religious communities and the challenges they have encountered. Neil El-Kadomi, President of Parramatta Mosque, expressed his gratitude that a respected leader of the Church was willing to visit and establish positive ties with the local Muslim community.



Bishop Vincent and Sheikh Mosaad at Parramatta Mosque

Photo: Patrick McInerney

An Interfaith Pilgrimage

Rev Dr Patrick McInerney and **Ryan Epondulan** facilitated an interfaith pilgrimage for three parishioners and the priest from Ulladulla. Lynne Kelly writes:

"Over 3 days we had guided tours of the *Great Synagogue*, the *Gallipoli Mosque*, and the *Emanuel Synagogue*. At all three places of worship we were welcomed with great warmth and a sincere hand of friendship. We experienced the Friday Prayers at the Mosque and the Friday evening Shabbat service at the Synagogue. We feel truly blessed to have had this experience. It has deepened our own relationship with Jesus, and given us a profound insight into the faith of our Muslim and Jewish brothers and sisters, which we can now employ to promote interfaith dialogue and harmony."

The staff of the Centre would be happy to facilitate interfaith pilgrimages to places of worship for other groups. Please get in touch!



Photo: Ryan Epondulan

PCID Delegation

In September 2018 a high-level delegation from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) visited Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. The members were Bishop Miguel Ayuso, Mons Indunil Kodithuwakku, Mons Santiago Michael and Fr Markus Solo SVD.

On 17 September **Rev Dr Patrick McInerney** attended the PCID delegation's meeting with the *Archdiocesan Commission for Ecumenism and Interreligious Relations*. That afternoon he and **Ryan Epondulan** participated in the PCID delegation's meeting with leaders of other religions.

On 19 September he presented a paper on interfaith in Australia to the joint meeting of the PCID delegation and the *Australian Catholic Council for Ecumenism and Interreligious Relations* (ACCEIR). He made three points: (1) the connection between ancient Aboriginal diversity and contemporary multicultural, multi-religious diversity; (2) the reasons for and challenges to our successful multicultural Australia; and (3) Australia's links with other countries convey our interfaith activities to the rest of the world.



Bishop Ayuso

Photo: Patrick McInerney

National Student Leadership Forum (NSLF)

The Centre was happy to support Ibrahim Taha's attendance at the 20th National Student Leadership Forum in Canberra. 200 student leaders from around the country met political leaders, business leaders and religious leaders and were tutored in servant leadership. They practised it by providing mundane services in local homes. They visited the War Memorial to learn of the sacrifice of the armed services. Ibrahim wrote that this quote from Arthur Ashe summed up his learning: *"Start where you are; use what you have; do what you can."* *Congratulations, Ibrahim!* For a full account of Ibrahim's experience at NSLF see: <https://goo.gl/fpsxkK>



World News

Beatification of Algerian Martyrs

The 19 martyrs of Algeria, including the seven Trappist monks of Tibhirine made famous by the film *Of Gods & Men*, will be beatified on 8 December in Oran, Algeria. They were all killed in the decade-long armed conflict between the government and extremist insurgents in the 1990s. Many Algerian Muslims too, were killed. These include Mohamed Bouchikhi, Algerian driver of Bishop Pierre Claverie, who, knowing the risks, chose to stay with his friend, the bishop, and died with him in the same bomb blast. 99 imams were killed for refusing to endorse violent extremism. This shared martyrdom bears blood witness to the bonds that unite Christians and Muslims. The beatification highlights that the true purpose of Christian presence among Muslims is not proselytism but genuine encounter and solidarity with the other.

For details see: <https://goo.gl/bt5qtG>,
<https://goo.gl/D9vVDf>, <https://goo.gl/keHYSY>,
<https://goo.gl/JKn3NU>



Muslims Attacked by Violent Christian Extremists

In the Central African Republic, which is 80% Christian, Christians are threatening the lives of Muslims. In 2013 a primarily Muslim militia ousted the government. In retaliation, Christian militia rose up against the rebels. Thousands on both sides have been killed in the ensuing 5-year ethnic conflict. Now some Christian leaders are calling for revenge for the Christians who have been killed and are attacking and killing Muslims. 2,000 Muslims have been given refuge in the grounds of St Peter Claver Catholic Cathedral in the southern city of Bangassou. Three hours to the east, hundreds of Muslim students and residents are sheltered in the parish of Zemio. Both the Muslim refugees and their protectors live in fear of the Christian militia. Abdoulaye, a Muslim refugee said, "We thank the church leaders (for) supporting us. We urge other Christians to be like them and stop attacking Muslims. We need to live in peace."

Asia Bibi's Death Sentence Overturned

Asia Bibi, a 47-year-old Pakistani Catholic and mother of five, was found guilty of blasphemy in 2010 and has languished on death row for the last 8 years. On 31 October 2018, the Pakistan Supreme Court overturned the guilty verdict. The ruling cited Islamic legal principles, including the following hadith: "Whoever is cruel and hard on a non-Muslim minority, or curtails their rights, or burdens them with more than they can bear, or takes anything from them against their free will; I, Prophet Muhammed, will complain against the person on the day of judgment." Hearing of the acquittal, the extremist group, *Tehreek-e-Labaik*, led street protests demanding her death. Christians feared retaliation against their churches and communities. In return for an end to the protests, the Pakistan government promised an overseas travel ban on Asia Bibi and a review of her case. The leader of the extremist group has been arrested. Given the complete disregard for law, one can legitimately ask, "Who is giving Islam a bad name?"

For details see: <http://bit.ly/2AvT59W>,
<http://bit.ly/2E3LyUd>

Muslim University Awards Jesuit Theologian

Prof Christian W Troll SJ has been awarded the Sir Syed Excellence Award in recognition of his work in Islamic studies and Christian-Muslim relations. *The Aligarh Muslim University* in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh presented the Jesuit priest with the award on 17 October. The award carries a citation and a cash prize of 200,000 Indian Rupees. Fr Troll is currently Professor Emeritus at the Jesuit School of Theology at Frankfurt. He has studied and lectured at a number of academic institutions in Europe and Asia and has published books and essays on Islam in India and dialogue between Christian and Muslims. We congratulate Fr Troll on this recognition of his achievements.

For details see: <http://bit.ly/2PKxqkT> and <http://bit.ly/2R0Y0qk>



Catholic Priest's Sermon in Mosque

It is not often that a Catholic priest addresses a Muslim congregation gathered for Friday prayers. However, Fr Joseph Puthussery spoke at the *Juma Mosque* in Kerala, India. After floods devastated much of the state in mid-August, over 580 homeless people sheltered at St Anthony Church, which soon ran out of food and water. Fr Puthussery asked the Imam for help and Muslims responded generously with supplies for several days. When the priest came to the mosque to thank them, they invited him to address the congregation. Fr Puthussery said, "Though the floods have taken away many valuables from us, what it took away first were the walls that we have built to separate each other." Fr Puthussery recalled the appeal of Pope Francis to "build bridges, not walls", underlining the need to continue interreligious collaboration to promote harmony in society. For details see: <http://bit.ly/2Akm7KN>



Feature Articles

Parliament of the World's Religions

Rev Dr Patrick McInerney



Fr Patrick McInerney with Rabbi Alon Goshen-Gottstein

Photo: Patrick McInerney

I had the privilege of attending the *Parliament of the World's Religions* in Toronto from 1-7 November 2018. With nearly 8,000 participants from 80 countries representing 220 distinct religions attending more than 500 workshops/seminars/panels over seven days from 7:00am-10:00pm, the Parliament was a multi-faith marathon!

It was literally the A to Z of religions - from Aboriginal or First Nation Peoples to Zoroastrians and everything in between! It was wonderful to be caught up in that broad sea of faiths, to experience the diversity of peoples, cultures, languages, religions, spiritualities and practices. Yes, there were exotic and strange groups, fringe spiritual organisations seeking and finding a home and legitimacy in this major world event. There were also believers from the major world religions with which most are familiar - Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism - even if only remotely.

But in the Parliament we overcame remoteness. We believers from different religions came together. We were no longer distant from each other. We attended workshops with panellists from different religions. We listened to each other. We learned about each other. We met, we shared, we addressed issues of common concern, we learned about interfaith issues and practices in other countries.

There were literally hundreds of workshops, seminars, panels and presentations, some with only a handful in attendance, others with hundreds, the plenaries bringing together thousands. The speakers and panellists were international interfaith celebrities, representatives from local, national and international interfaith organisations, and interfaith activists who shared their often unheralded but necessary work in promoting interfaith relations in a wide variety of settings around the world, from universities, to suburbs, to conflict zones.

There were streams or tracks which one could follow, among them indigenous peoples, women, justice, climate action, justice, countering war, hate & violence, next generation. I chose to pick and choose sessions, someone whose work I had read, an interfaith activist whose name I knew by reputation, a theme relevant to my interfaith work in Christian-Muslim relations and with youth.

We recognised the culpability of religions in creating division and hatred in history and in some parts of the world today (though I hasten to add that this is more accurately diagnosed as the use, abuse and misuse of religion for ulterior purposes). We accepted also the call and the responsibility of religions to be agents of change in the world, to make our future better than our past, by together promoting peace, justice, harmony and sustainability.

In this welter of diverse religious and spiritual traditions, we discovered a common core, a shared principle, a common commitment to "transcendence" (however differently this was named and practised). While I cannot identify a particular moment or a specific lesson that I learned at the Parliament, it was wonderful to experience the positive interfaith energy that it generated. In the light of this profound experience I could only stammer incomprehendingly, "It is good for us to be here." (*cf Mt 17:4, Lk 9:3*)

The Parliament was not perfect. I sensed that mainstream Christian churches and other world religions were under-represented. Individuals and organisations from these faith traditions did participate, but they were marginal to the faith communities they represented rather than mainstream community practitioners. There was also a tendency to disparage theological differences in favour of activism - let's not talk about differences, but let's work together to transform the world.

In short, the Parliament of the World's Religions is a broad sea, but a shallow one. It is up to those of us who attended to dig deeper channels of communication within and between our religions, so that interfaith relations grow and deepen and become more mainstream. Then we will be able to bring the riches of our different traditions to bear on the issues of society and be an inspiration and agents of change and transformation.



Interfaith Dialogue Feeds the Soul

There are many jokes that begin, "A Jew, a Christian and a Muslim walk into a..." It's good for a laugh because it's based on a negative stereotype that suggests it is highly improbable that these three would voluntarily associate with one another. Yet for the last 40 years, believers from diverse theological backgrounds in Springfield USA have been doing just that.

Four religious leaders within the Springfield community - the late Rev Dr Richard Maye, Rev Mark Watkins, Rev Andy Templeman and Rabbi Barry Marks - had a vision. The four saw a possibility of entering into dialogue based on their shared values and jointly tackling community issues.

Originally, Jewish, Protestant, Catholic and Unitarian clergy met over brownbag lunches once a month, as GSIA still does today. What they did not anticipate was the deep friendship and respect that they and the future members of the Greater Springfield Interfaith Association (GSIA) would develop. Nor could they foresee a future that included as many other faiths as it does today.

After 40 years, the organisation developed their first logo. It illustrates their belief that all faiths grow out of a spiritual sense of mystery and should be held with reverence and respect. The symbols are representative of the faith organisations in Springfield – all of which have participated in GSIA in one way or another over the years.

Their monthly meetings have not been limited to chatting and chewing. They are also opportunities to educate themselves about each other's religious traditions, beliefs and practices and to learn about community issues and services. However, they soon learned they had to get out into the wider community and practice what they preached.

GSIA members have been instrumental in founding *Helping Hands Homeless Shelter, Interfaith Caregivers*, provided food for the homeless and volunteered in the construction of two *Habitat for Humanity* interfaith home builds.

Members developed more than tolerance for each other. They created close personal relationships, attended each other's religious services, installations, weddings and stood side-by-side at funerals.

And they have provided for each other's organisational needs. For example, before the establishment of a mosque in the 1980s, Muslims



would attend weekly services and holiday celebrations in the basement of First Presbyterian Church. When that first mosque was destroyed by arsonists in 1995, five religious congregations responded by offering their places of worship. Members of the Islamic community reciprocated by attending *Shabbat* services at Temple Israel after their stained glass windows were shattered by vandals two weekends in a row.

There are also personal acts of kindness shown to each other, for example, offering prayers and support during family and health crises. One member calls GSIA her "oxygen". Every year on 2 October, GSIA also host the *Annual Welcoming Banquet*, to which attendees are encouraged to bring a vegetarian potluck dish to share.

Interfaith dialogue plays a major role in the study of religion and peacekeeping. However, it needs to occur outside of seminaries and in the real world with real life applications to be a tool for change.

Adapted from an article by Dr Mostoufi, who is a chaplain to the Muslim community, speaker, writer and President of the *Greater Springfield Interfaith Association* (GSIA).

For original article see <http://bit.ly/2PKXIZB>
For GSIA see <http://www.gsia.info/>

Sharing Personal Experiences for Growing in Interfaith



Students and educators of different religious backgrounds across the United States gathered in Chicago to share stories, build relationships, and equip themselves with the skill set needed to lead interfaith conversations in the future, for the good of their religious communities and the world.

The *Interfaith Leadership Institute* (ILI) is hosted by *Interfaith Youth Core* (IYC), an organisation founded by Eboo Patel, a former member of President Barack Obama's inaugural *Advisory Council on Faith-Based Neighbourhood Partnerships*. IYC's mission involves collaborating with "colleges and universities to turn religious diversity into a positive force in our society."

"ILI is the largest gathering of students and educators with a commitment to American religious pluralism. Over the course of three days, participants learn to bridge divides and forge friendships across lines of religious and worldview differences."

Melanie-Prejean Sullivan, former director of campus ministry at Bellarmine University, in Louisville, Kentucky, said that sharing personal faith experiences is the best way to get students engaged, as they are often afraid of their faith being challenged and lack the education to defend all of its beliefs and practices. When people share their personal faith journeys, however, "you're telling about experience. ... You may not be an expert in the field of, say, Roman Catholicism, but you can say why you like being Catholic, or why you choose to remain Catholic when you have different options when you leave home." IYC believes these kinds of conversations are extremely important in finding common ground and

understanding. "Relationships, positive attitudes and appreciative knowledge are closely related to each other such that an increase in one leads to an increase in the others. If you know some accurate and positive things about a religion, and you know some people from that religion, you are far more likely to have positive attitudes towards the tradition and that community."

Though the conference was nonpartisan, the current state of polarization in the US did not go unnoticed. In his keynote speech to the conference, Patel reminded attendees that in times like these, interfaith work can be challenging, but that they are answering an important call.

I do not for a second want you to think that I believe this is going to be easy. We have signed up for the hard work of being interfaith leaders in at a time in which large swathes of people have weaponized their identities and are wounding one another. It is enormously tempting in that situation to circle around your flag, burrow in your bunker, declare those outside your lines the enemy and fire away.... And in a situation when hurt is all around, some group of people has to stand up and be healers.

Adapted from the article, *Students share personal experiences to grow as interfaith leaders*, by James Dearie, an NCR Bertelsen intern, published in The National Catholic Reporter on 31 August 2018.

For full article see <https://goo.gl/yAXrro>

"Islam" and "Islamism"

Excerpts from the article, Why the media needs to be more responsible for how it links Islam and Islamist terrorism, by Audrey County, PhD candidate, School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science, Griffith University and Halim Rane, Associate Professor, Griffith University, published online in The Conversation on 1 October 2018.

Since the September 11, 2001 attacks in the US, Islam has become central to debates about social cohesion and national security in Australia.

The media are playing an essential role in informing us about Islam and influencing how we respond. But, perhaps due to a limited understanding of Islam or a fear of antagonising Muslims, a fundamental point has largely been absent from reporting: the threat of terrorism does not stem from Islam. Rather, it stems from Islamism, a political ideology.

The two terms may sound similar, but Islam and Islamism are not the same thing. Islam is a faith observed by over 1.6 billion people, whereas Islamism is the political ideology of relatively small groups that borrow concepts like shariah and jihad from Islam and reinterpret them to gain legitimacy for their political goals.

How the media legitimises the aims of terrorists

Islamist groups like al Qaida and the Islamic State use violence against non-Muslims with the aim of establishing a political institution ("caliphate") based on shariah law – neither of which have a basis in the Quran or hadith (Islamic prophetic traditions). Part of the appeal of the Islamic State comes from its insidious ability to selectively use Islamic teachings and repackage them as legitimate religious obligations.

In particular, Islamists have appropriated the concept of jihad to legitimise an offensive "holy war" against non-Muslims. This interpretation, however, has been rejected by studies that have examined the Quran's principles concerning war and peace.

Islamic teachings, for instance, prohibit terrorism and the use of violence against civilians. Further, Muslim leaders and scholars around the world have repeatedly condemned terrorism, issuing fatwas (Islamic legal rulings).

By reporting on this misleading interpretation of jihad and under-reporting Muslim condemnations, the Western news media reinforce the perceived connection between Islam and terrorism.

In some cases, media pundits explicitly make this link, pointing to the fact terrorists specifically refer to "Islam" as the basis for their actions.

This uncritical acceptance of terrorists' claims and misrepresenting of Islam legitimises and unwittingly promotes the Islamist agenda.

In other words, the media plays into the hands of terrorists by allowing them to become the representatives for Islam and Muslims in general.

The impact of careless reporting

Overly simplistic and sensationalist media coverage serves the Islamic State's objective to pit Muslims and non-Muslims against one another.

As a study conducted at the University of Vienna in 2017 confirmed, media coverage that does not explicitly distinguish between Muslims and Islamist terrorists fuels hostile attitudes toward the general Muslim population.

With growing awareness of the impact of this kind of reporting, some media outlets like CNN have tried to distinguish between "moderate Islam" and "radical Islam", "Islam" and "Islamic extremism". But this, too, is misleading because it focuses on presumed religious motivations and overlooks the central role of Islamist political ideology.

A survey of almost 1,200 foreigner fighters by the Combating Terrorism Center revealed that over 85% had no formal religious education and were not lifelong, strict adherents to Islam. The report suggests the Islamic State may prefer such recruits because they are less capable of critically scrutinising the jihadi narrative and ideology.

Islamism masquerades as religion, but is much more a post-colonial expression of political grievances than a manifestation of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings. While the establishment of a caliphate or shariah-based order is the expressed agenda of Islamist terrorists, this is not a religious obligation for Muslims.

For the full article see <https://goo.gl/XZkQHV>

Coming Events

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27

December 2018

- 8:** Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (Catholic Christian)
- 10:** Human Rights Day - Anniversary of 1948 UN *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*
- 25:** Christmas - Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ (Western & Eastern Christian)

January 2019

- 1:** New Year's Day – Mary, Mother of God (Catholic Christian)
- 6:** Feast of the Epiphany (Theophany) (Western and some Eastern Christians)
- 7:** Feast of the Nativity (Eastern Orthodox Christian)

February 2019

- 1-7:** World Interfaith Harmony Week
- 2:** Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (Christian)
- 5:** Lunar New Year
- 14:** Valentine's Day

March 2019

- 6:** Ash Wednesday – Beginning of Lent (Christian)
- 11:** Great Lent (Orthodox Christian)
- 17:** St Patrick's Day (Christian)
- 21:** Harmony Day - Celebrates Australia's cultural diversity
- 25:** Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Christian)



Bridges

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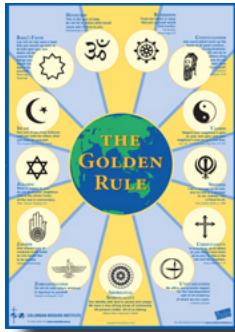


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