



Bridges

Building relationships between Christians and Muslims



No. 97 December 2022

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From the Editor

Interreligious dialogue is usually divided into four types. The **dialogue of life** is living out our faith in daily life by showing respect, appreciation and kindness for others i.e. being a good neighbour. The **dialogue of action** is working together on common social issues based on shared values. The **dialogue of theological exchange** is sharing about the beliefs, values, and practices of our religions. The **dialogue of religious experience** is sharing how we connect with the transcendent source of our lives through prayer, meditation, and worship. These four types expand the scope of interfaith relations.

Life: Interfaith is more than the formal academic conferences, talks and seminars, as it includes the relations we develop with friends from other faiths, which draws us into sharing their joys and sorrows (p. 2).

Action: Working for peace is a common task of all religions (pp. 4, 6, 7), as is care for our common home and taking joint action to mitigate the effects of climate change (pp. 6, 10).

It is countering underrepresentation and misrepresentation in the media (pp. 4, 5), one of the commitments of *The Sydney Statement* (pp. 7, 9.).

Theological Exchange: An interfaith webinar series for the anniversary of the 1965 publication of *Nostra Aetate* had four scholars sharing about Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism, the four religions named in that ground-breaking document (p. 2). The Christian perspective on Interreligious dialogue is grounded in the relations between the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity (p. 3)

Religious Experience: Dr Azza Karam pleaded with the Assembly of the World Council of Churches that the love of Christ is not meant for Christians only but is meant for all of humanity (p. 9).

Pope Francis called for renewed efforts at dialogue, encounter and journey in his visits to Kazakhstan and Bahrain (pp 6, 7). Bishop Vincent commissioned the members of the Interfaith Commission to carry out that mission (p. 8), but it is up to each one of us.

REV DR PATRICK MCINERNEY

Columban Centre for
Christian-Muslim Relations
c/o Bishop Bede Heather Centre
1-5 Marion St
BLACKTOWN NSW 2148
E: info.cccmr@columban.org.au
P: (02) 9672 3616
www.columban.org.au

/ChristianMuslimRelations
 /AbrahamConference
 /TheSydneyStatement
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New Interfaith Conference, Blacktown

One of the early partners of the Western Sydney Women's IntHERfaith Initiative (WSWII), Harinder Kaur of the Harman Foundation, hosted an inaugural interfaith conference just up the road from our Centre in Blacktown, Sydney.

Kim Chong consulted with Harinder on the event, and **Rev Dr Patrick McInerney** featured as keynote speaker. Patrick shared with attendees the foundational elements of interreligious dialogue, promoted the works of the Centre, and provided interfaith resources, such as thesydneystatement.org.au. Many members of the audience, who worked in community and faith organisations local to our Centre in Western Sydney, learned of our specialisation in interfaith dialogue for the first time and were keen to connect with us beyond the conference to learn more and potentially collaborate. Kim organised further meetings with women who were at the event to discuss WSWII and to learn more about their work in Blacktown, particularly with victims of domestic and family violence, and the fostering of children by families who share the child's faith.



YTU Nostra Aetate Interfaith Webinar Series

On the first two Mondays in September and in October 2022, Yarra Theological Union (YTU) and Garrett Publishing combined to present an interfaith webinar series to honour the anniversary of the publication of *Nostra Aetate*, the declaration on the relation of the Catholic Church with non-Christian religions, on 28 October 1965. The series

treated the four world religions named in the Vatican document. Sr Mary Reaburn, a Sister of Sion, presented on Judaism; Fr Albano da Costa, an SVD from India, on Hinduism; Fr Thien Nguyen, an SVD from Vietnam, on Buddhism; and **Rev Dr Patrick McInerney**, director of the Centre, presented on Islam. It was primarily a Catholic audience who attended, particularly school teachers, who could gain professional development credits. The themes in the series consisted of the different religious perspectives on God, principal beliefs, women, and what we can learn from the respective traditions. Many audience members expressed being inspired to continue learning and promoting interfaith dialogue. Preparing the presentations each week was a demanding task for speakers, but it was a positive contribution to highlighting just how relevant and necessary interfaith dialogue is in today's world.

Joys and Sorrows, by Patrick McInerney

Recently I was privileged to attend the wedding of a Muslim couple, Waseem Ahmad and Mobinah Ahmad (with whom I'm pictured at right). The bride was the daughter of a family I have known for many years, whose home I have visited on many occasions, with whom I have often celebrated *Eid*, who consider me part of their extended family. I had attended the funerals of her paternal grandparents earlier this year. These family occasions of joy and sorrow prompted me to reflect that interreligious dialogue is not just the talks, workshops, and conferences. It is most of all the relationships we develop with believers from other religions. They bind us together in friendship. We enter into their joys and sorrows. It fulfills the opening words of the Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*: "The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time ... are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well". We belong together. Interreligious dialogue makes this a living reality. For further reflection see "Just Show Up!": bit.ly/3DY9dSC.



Ministerial Visit

On 25 August 2022, the Hon Mark Coure, MP, Minister for Multiculturalism and Minister for Seniors (second from left), visited the Centre at his own request. Since being appointed to the role of Multiculturalism in December 2021, he has made great efforts to get to know the people at the local level. We were delighted to host him, to share about our interfaith activities, to thank the NSW Government for funding support over the years, and to share our concerns and needs. We presented him with a poster of *The Sydney Statement*, a long overdue presentation delayed since the official launch in March 2021. *The Sydney Statement* was generated by the young adult members of [Youth PoWR \(Parliament of the World's Religions\)](#) during consultation events across Sydney in 2019. It is a powerful resource for the practice of interfaith dialogue in our modern world. You can view the charter of values, principles and commitments to interfaith at thesydneystatement.org.au. We encourage you to “read, sign, share” the statement to show your support.



Christian Perspective on Interreligious Dialogue

On 14-15 October 2022, **Fr Patrick McInerney** presented two workshops on interreligious dialogue at the National Biennial Deacons' Conference, attended by about 100 people from around Australia. On 3-4 November 2022, he presented three workshops at the Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta's (CEDP) symposium, "Catholic Education for All: Building a Culture of Dialogue", attended by 300 teachers, RECs, priests and leaders from Western Sydney. Both occasions provided an opportunity to present a specifically Christian perspective on interfaith relations. Interreligious dialogue is an integral part of the evangelising mission of the church because it is patterned on and flows from the relations in the Holy Trinity. Hence, all Christians are called to make dialogue the way of life of every parish, school and church organisation. It is part of synodality and fraternity, two recurrent themes in Pope Francis' talks and writings. To invite Fr Patrick McInerney to give a talk please contact the Centre at info.cccmr@columban.org.au or phone (02) 9672 3616.



Women's Interfaith-101 Workshop

On 23 August 2022, **Kim Chong** presented a lunchtime workshop on foundational elements of interfaith dialogue to the [Western Sydney Women's IntHERfaith Initiative](#). It was hosted in the gathering room at the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations in Blacktown over sandwiches and cupcakes. About 20 women from the Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Jain faiths attended. The workshop explored the questions: What is interfaith dialogue? What is its purpose? How is it practiced? Even though many of the women were familiar with interfaith dialogue, Kim thought it would be useful to provide concrete definitions to help them develop a deeper understanding and context of the practice. Drawing on information primarily from thesydneystatement.org.au, the 'Interfaith-101' workshop presented a brief history of interfaith dialogue, what it is and what it is not, definitions and examples of its four forms – life, action, theological exchange, and religious experience – its purpose in an Australian context, real-world examples, resources, and *The Golden Rule*. The women also participated by sharing their own experiences of interfaith relations.



Muslims Underrepresented on TV

A new study released in September 2022 shows that despite making up a quarter of the world's population, only 1% of speaking characters on popular TV series in the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand are Muslim. *Erased or Extremists: The Stereotypical View of Muslims in Popular Episodic Series*, released by the University of Southern California, says that in more than 200 TV series aired between 2018 and 2019, only 12 series regulars

were Muslim. Seven of those were perpetrators or targets of violence. More than half were men and mostly Middle Eastern or North African, despite Muslims being one of the most ethnically diverse religious groups in the world. The ratio of male Muslim characters to female is 174:1. Muslim women tended to be depicted as "fearful and endangered". The study pointed to shows that have countered stereotypes, like *Ramy* (pictured). Nonetheless, portrayals typically reflect pervasive stereotyping of Muslim characters and have real-life impact. Condensed and adapted from n.pr/3swKu2r and cnn.it/3szVsnN. Read the study in full at bit.ly/3TY4jvv.

Christian and Muslim Students in Dialogue

In July, Christian students from Mercer University in the US travelled to Morocco to study alongside Muslim students from Al-Akhawayn University to learn about each other's faiths in a spirit of interfaith solidarity. "The idea was to talk about the motivations of the love of God and neighbour out of our two traditions," said Rev Dr Robert Nash Jr, Professor of Missions and World Religions at Mercer. Students participated in several activities that encouraged listening and understanding. This included an interfaith hike through the Atlas Mountains where students from different religions walked in pairs, talking about their faith and what motivated them to love God and their neighbour. Another activity involved students sharing about their earliest religious memory. "Our tendency is to objectify the other, so this experience causes those we view as 'other' to suddenly become friends. We associate our experience [of Muslims] with a friend whom we have talked with about their faith rather than just what we see on the news," said Rev Dr Nash. Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3gRaGCI.



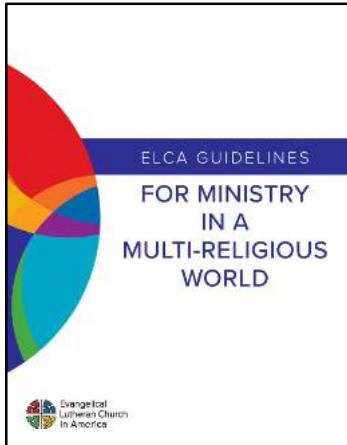
Cries for Peace

The 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), held in Karlsruhe, Germany, from 31 August to 8 September, issued a statement, *The Things That Make for Peace: Moving the World to Reconciliation and Unity*. Acknowledging the threats to peace in our world, the statement "strongly affirms the commitment of the WCC and its member churches to peace-making through interreligious dialogue and cooperation at all levels, as a key contribution to countering the forces of division, confrontation, polarisation, and injustice".

In October 2022, the Sant'Egidio community hosted their annual Peace Conference marking the anniversary of the "Prayers for Peace" convoked by Saint Pope John Paul II in Assisi in 1986. The closing ceremony was an ecumenical prayer service inside the Colosseum, followed by a multi-faith appeal for peace. The Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim leaders were particularly mindful of the dire situation in Ukraine and the threat of nuclear war. "Peace is at the heart of the religions, their sacred writings and their teaching," said Pope Francis. "Let us once more put peace at the heart of our vision for the future, as the primary goal of our personal, social and political activity at every level. Let us defuse conflicts by the weapon of dialogue." For WCC Statement see: bit.ly/3Ehu44I. For Pope Francis' speech see: bit.ly/3hsNEBL. For commentaries see: bit.ly/3WJv20L, bit.ly/3WODrjm, bit.ly/3U2mmS, bit.ly/3fPHviJ.

Asia Focus on Interreligious Dialogue

On 27 August 2022, Archbishop of Singapore, William Goh Seng Chye (pictured), was created a cardinal by Pope Francis. He is the first Singaporean cardinal. The small island nation is diverse in faith, consisting of Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Taoist and Hindu faiths. Cardinal Goh has vowed to promote unity and love “among all humankind” and hopes to establish a research centre for interreligious work. Speaking at the Cardinalate Thanksgiving Mass held at St Joseph’s Church in Upper Bukit Timah, Cardinal Goh said: “We are called to foster brotherhood and solidarity among all regardless of race, language, religion or culture.” In October, experts echoed similar statements to the gathering of Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) in Bangkok. Some 175 bishops and delegates from 29 Asian nations were discussing the need for dialogue, peace and reconciliation during their general conference as part of the FABC golden jubilee celebrations. The Church needs to be proactive and “become an agent of peace”, said FABC president Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, who heads the Church in Myanmar. He presented Asia as nations of great opportunities, optimism and survival and said the Church should “initiate dialogue [and] advocate for equality”. *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3DreWjl and bit.ly/3DvW2Ia.*



Guidelines for Ministry in a Multi-Religious World

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has published *Guidelines for Ministry in a Multi-Religious World*. This new document builds on ELCA's 2019 document, *A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment*, which laid the theological foundations for Evangelical Lutheran engagement in dialogue. The new document is pastorally oriented. It presents a positive account of Lutheran convictions and attitudes in approaching people of other faiths. It provides a wealth of practical suggestions and guidelines for planning and conducting the variety of multi-faith occasions that occur regularly in our religiously diverse societies, including prayer services, engaging in social justice actions together, pastoral care, weddings, and funerals. The considerations are relevant for Christian services with people of other faiths in attendance, and also for multi-faith events on civic occasions. They encourage appropriate inclusivity and participation. These guidelines will prove useful for priests, ministers, teachers, local government, and religious and community leaders who are called upon to plan and conduct interfaith and multi-faith services and activities. *For Guidelines see: bit.ly/3Tnclgv. For Declaration see: bit.ly/3Equis.*

New Report Addresses Failure of Social Media

In October, the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) released a report calling for government to actively address the failure of social media platforms in mitigating hateful material and the grave harms of online Islamophobia. While there are a number of competing approaches to the regulation of social media, the ICV's preference is to reform the systems that have enabled and, indeed, at times encouraged the widespread and unchecked dissemination of hate speech, rather than attempt the practically impossible task of taking down hundreds of millions of individual pieces of anti-Muslim content. To implement this approach, the ICV proposes that Australia place a statutory duty on platforms to take reasonable care to protect users from harm (the ‘eSafety duty of care’), similar to the regime set to be established by the UK’s Online Safety Bill 2021. *Download the report at bit.ly/3NheZTG.*



Pope Francis in Kazakhstan

The pope attends Seventh Congress of World and Traditional Religions

From 13-15 September 2022, Pope Francis visited Kazakhstan to attend the Seventh Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. Below are excerpts from Antonio Spadaro's, "Francis' Journey to Kazakhstan, 'Country of Encounter'", bit.ly/3UurOrw.

On Pope Francis' Address to the Opening Session

The Congress of Religious Leaders, in particular, drew attention to four serious global challenges. The first is the **pandemic**: we have all felt fragile, all in need of assistance, not self-sufficient. Now, therefore, "we are challenged not to squander the powerful sense of solidarity that we experienced by pressing on as if nothing happened". Not forgetting vulnerability means feeling called to care.

The second challenge is **peace**. Our days are marked by the scourge of war. "Mindful of the wrongs and errors of the past, let us unite our efforts to ensure that the Almighty will never again be held hostage to the human thirst for power," the pope exhorted. The pope's speech revolved around the figure of the poet Abai¹ (1845-1904), who stated that "he who allows evil and does not oppose evil cannot be considered a true believer".

The third challenge is **fraternal welcome** in a context in which "each day children, born and unborn, migrants and elderly persons, are cast aside, discarded. There exists a throwaway culture. Many of our brothers and sisters die sacrificed on the altar of profit, amid clouds of the sacrilegious incense of indifference". Abai reiterates this by saying that "all people are guests of one another" and "man himself is a guest in this life".

The fourth challenge is the **care of the common home**. Abai wrote: "What a wonderful world the Creator has given us! He magnanimously and generously gave us his light, when mother-earth fed us from her breast, our Father in heaven thoughtfully hovered over us." Francis stated that "the mindset of exploitation is in fact destroying the home in which we live". It leads to "eclipsing that respectful and religious vision of the world willed by the Creator".

In light of these four global challenges, Francis finally prayed: "May we never aim at artificial and conciliatory forms of syncretism, but instead firmly maintain our own identities, open to the courage



Pope Francis is welcomed by Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev as he arrives at the international airport in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan.

of otherness and to fraternal encounter. Only in this way, in these dark times in which we live, will we be able to radiate the light of our Creator."

On Pope Francis' Address to the Closing Session

Today "the great wisdoms and religions are called to bear witness to the existence of a common spiritual and moral patrimony, which is based on two cornerstones: transcendence and fraternity". Taking up the final Declaration of the Congress, Francis then underlined three words. The first is **peace**: the Declaration "exhorts world leaders to stop conflicts and bloodshed everywhere, and to abandon aggressive and destructive rhetoric". The second is **women**: "because women give care and life to the world, they are the way to peace". He also commented: "How many choices of death would be avoided if women were at the centre of decisions!" The third word is **youth**: "They are the messengers of peace and unity of today and tomorrow. They are the ones who, more than others, invoke peace and respect for the common home of creation."

¹ Abai Kunanbayuly (1845-1904), a Kazakh poet and writer who expressed the soul of his country..

For Address to Civic Authorities see: bit.ly/3WR6SRY.

For Address to Opening Session see: bit.ly/3NV3uI7.

For Homily at Mass see: bit.ly/3Epcegc.

For Address to Bishops, Priests, Religious see: bit.ly/3fUmPX4.

For Address to Closing Session see: bit.ly/3fV4VDo.

For Text of Final Declaration see: bit.ly/3NVQrif.

Pope Francis in Bahrain

First pope to visit Bahrain – promotes Christian-Muslim dialogue

From 3-6 November 2022, Pope Francis made an historic visit to Bahrain, the first time ever a pope visited this country. He summarised the purpose of his visit as “dialogue, encounter and journey”.

Pope Francis witnessed to these themes in the various meetings he held, with civic authorities, with religious leaders, with Muslim elders, in ecumenical prayer with other Christians, in a Eucharist with Catholics, and in a meeting with youth, and elaborated on these themes in his various addresses.

He commended the religious diversity of Bahrain, with ancient traditions of encounter between people, augmented by many migrant workers contributing to the productivity of the country. He pleaded for respect for the inherent dignity of every person, free from all forms of discrimination. He spoke up for the rights of workers everywhere. He upheld the right to life, even for those being punished.

He spoke out repeatedly against conflict, violence and war, condemning the “childish” behaviour of potentates who foster ancient animosities, ambitions and divisions, causing immense suffering to many people. He spoke up on behalf of true religious freedom, recognition of women, protection of children’s fundamental rights, and the concept of full, equal, and inclusive citizenship. He highlighted the role and responsibility of religious leaders to be artisans of peace, not just in words, but in concrete action, especially in confronting together the many challenges of our time. He called for solidarity with the poor, the marginalised, and the exploited earth. Below are excerpts from two of his speeches:

From Address to Bahrain Forum

Dear friends, let us pursue this path; let us open our hearts to our brothers and sisters; let us press forward on the journey towards greater knowledge and understanding of one another. Let us strengthen the bonds between us, without duplicity or fear, in the name of the Creator who has put us together in this world as guardians of our brothers and sisters.

So let us encounter one another for the sake of humanity and in the name of the One who loves humanity, the One whose name is peace. Let us promote concrete initiatives to ensure that the journey of the great



Pope Francis with Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.

religions will be ever more effective and ongoing, a conscience of peace for our world!

From Address to Muslim Council of Elders

God is the source of peace. May he enable us to be channels of his peace everywhere! Here, in your presence, I wish to state once more that the God of peace never brings about war, never incites hatred, never supports violence. We, who believe in him, are called to promote peace with tools of peace, such as encounter, patient negotiations and dialogue, which is the oxygen of peaceful coexistence.

I believe that increasingly we need to encounter one another, to get to know and to esteem one another, to put reality ahead of ideas and people ahead of opinions, openness to heaven ahead of differences on earth. We need to put a future of fraternity ahead of a past of antagonism, overcoming historical prejudices and misunderstandings in the name of the One who is the source of peace. Indeed, how can believers of different religions and cultures live side-by-side, accept and esteem one another if we remain distant and detached? Let us be guided by the saying of Imam Ali: “People are of two types: they are either brothers and sisters in religion or fellow men and women in humanity”, and so feel called to care for all those whom the divine plan has placed alongside us in the world.

For Address to Civic Authorities see: bit.ly/3NYuINd.

For Address to Bahrain Forum for Dialogue see: bit.ly/3WR29j7.

For Address to the Muslim Council of Elders see: bit.ly/3hAKmNb.

For Address to the Ecumenical Meeting see: bit.ly/3TmmJ8c.

For Homily at Mass in National Stadium see: bit.ly/3UtUgqE.

For Address to Youth see: bit.ly/3Uv4oae.

For Address to Bishops, Priests, Religious see: bit.ly/3Tv7byZ.

Commissioning the Interfaith Commission

Interfaith Commission of the Diocese of Parramatta receives blessing

During the 9.30am Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral on Sunday 22 September 2022, Bishop Vincent Long formally commissioned the 13 members of the newly established Interfaith Commission of the Diocese of Parramatta. Family members were also present. Fr Patrick McInerney, Director of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations and consultant to the Commission, concelebrated the Mass. The ceremony was a simple but moving blessing. Afterwards, all gathered in the Cathedral Hall for refreshments. Below please find the relevant excerpt from Bishop Vincent's homily and the prayer of blessing.

Bishop Vincent's Homily

This morning, we thank God and pray for the recently formed Diocesan Interfaith Commission, which is being sent on our behalf to strengthen the social fabric of Western Sydney through interfaith engagement. At my Installation, I pledged to continue the legacy of my predecessors in building stronger relationships with non-Christian people. I believe we must foster pathways across the political and religious divide to create an inclusive and harmonious society.

We are the epitome of multicultural, multi-faith and ethnically diverse Australia. It is for this reason that we are privileged to host the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations. It has played a vital role in building bridges in our community, bridges of understanding, inclusion and solidarity, instead of walls of prejudice, division, and exclusion. The Diocesan Interfaith Commission will leverage this vital connection and promote harmony among all our brothers and sisters. As Pope Francis said recently, "I don't renounce my faith if I speak with the faith of someone else, rather, I make my faith known because I speak to others, and I listen to them."

This is what faithful discipleship looks like. It is a journey that demands courage because it forces us to abandon security in favour of passion for justice and preferential option for God's poor.

Let us pray that we may prioritise the common good and reflect the divine goodness instead of self-interest. May the teaching and example of Jesus guide us as we endeavour to build relationships and communities that mirror the Reign of God. May we reflect the largesse, magnanimity and compassion of God revealed in Christ.

Prayer of Blessing

Today we have with us the Members of the Interfaith Commission. This Commission will work to advance the vision of Pope Francis in forging a new fraternity in our fractured world. With these men and women of goodwill, let us build a better Australia and a better world. May our endeavour to build true peace and unity be brought to fulfilment in accordance with God's vision of the fullness of life for all humanity.

Lord, Father of our human family, you created all human beings equal in dignity: pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter, dialogue, justice and peace. Move us to create healthier societies and a more dignified world, a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war. May their hearts be open to all the peoples and nations of the earth. May they recognise the goodness and beauty that you have sown in each of us, and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects, and shared dreams.

For a detailed report see: bit.ly/3WMLwKd.



Members of the Interfaith Commission (from left): Len Cruz, Fr Kevin Medilo, Ryan Epondulan, Deacon Michael Tan (Deputy Chair), Irene Adamson, Mike Yates, Fr Michael Hardie, Bishop Vincent Long, Debbie Grigson (Chair), Kate Xavier, Lorraine Murphy, Fr Patrick McInerney, Anthony Maher and Alicja Borciuch. Not pictured is Sr Colleen Foley

"Christ's love was meant for me too," Dr Azza Karam

Dr Azza Karam, formerly of the UN, tells WCC it's time to "act as believers"

During each of her nearly 20 years working for the United Nations, Dr Azza Karam, now secretary general for Religions for Peace, would, along with prime ministers and presidents, take in "the awe-inspiring moment" as the UN General Assembly got underway each year.

"To be very honest with you," Karam told the World Council of Churches (WCC) in September, "this [11th] Assembly and this room is far more inspiring and far more meaningful".

Karam, a citizen of the Netherlands living in the US, said she understands both the power and responsibility of politics. "It is a very big burden and a very serious responsibility to deliver on the mission of a government to protect its citizens and the people within its territories," Karam said. "The challenge, however, is far greater for faith leaders", because it is spiritual, moral, political, emotional, mental and practical. "That is why," she said in the first of several rounds of applause, "I firmly believe the power of faith leaders far, far exceeds the power of political leaders."

"I wish to make a plea," she said, "and if I hadn't been so short, I would get on my knees as I make my plea. ... The plea is this: Christ's love wasn't mean only for people of the Christian faith. If Christ's love is meant for all of humanity, what would that mean practically for each of us in this room? I believe very firmly as a Muslim that Christ's love was meant for me too."

"Consider how much more of Christ's love can be spread when we work multi-religiously to serve everyone – not just one community, not just one religion, but everyone," Karam said.

To Karam, Christ's resurrection "is meant to symbolise that moment when we all come together to serve each other regardless of our genders, nationalities, religions or nations. But in order to do so, we have a political and moral obligation not to be used by the politicians and the political establishments," Karam said to more applause. "We have a moral obligation to be the conscience of the political establishments." That requires first an inward look "to make sure that when we point a finger at one another or at the political establishment, we are also looking inward to see



where we ourselves may be replicating the same distancing, exclusion and superiority that sometimes we claim our political establishments do".

"Our political establishment today, everywhere in the world, has proved that it cannot serve the needs of everyone," Karam said. "Furthermore, our political establishments today, regardless of east, west, north or south, democratic or not, have also proven that war is an easier option," Karam said, looking out at the thousands gathered in plenary. "You can demonstrate not only through words – though heaven knows the Word is powerful because that is how we see God and know God's presence – but you can demonstrate through actions of standing together in solidarity. Regardless of your faith tradition, regardless of distinctions, you can demonstrate that war is not an option."

If every single Christian "were to come together in very firm solidarity and unity, when that day happens, God willing – whether it's under the aegis of the WCC or any other aegis – please believe me it will be a wonderful moment," Karam said. "But it will not be enough, because our world consists of so many more who deserve Christ's love but who may not come under that church aegis."

"But they come under the church that is the mother of us all – that is, the faith that brings us all together," Karam said. "We can be believers. Let's act as believers." Listen to Dr Azza Karam's brief address at bit.ly/3EB3L9F. Her talk begins at 22:07. Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3Wp1wNH.

Faiths unite to take action on climate change

Interfaith is more than just "talk", it's also action

Interfaith leaders are embodying the phrase “action speaks louder than words” — and it could make all the difference in the world. Around the globe, interfaith-climate organisations are uniting to minimise the harmful impact of climate change.

Interfaith work has been a growing movement since the early 1900s – just after World War I. But it really took off as a popular movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with interfaith organisations multiplying across the world in an effort to cross divides between religions and curtail discrimination. The early stages included talking about divisions; now focus is on putting those dialogues to use and working together to solve problems for the common good.

Many religions believe the Earth is sacred, created by a divine being. In 2022, global warming is causing floods from melting ice caps, and communities globally face power outages and crop-killing droughts, putting the Earth in jeopardy. Environmental stress is bringing together people of different faiths to act for climate change. Teaming up makes for greater outcomes.

As recently as October 2022, in light of the UN Conference on Climate Change (COP27) in November, the newly established Centre of Christian-Muslim Understanding and Partnership (CCMUP) in Egypt, stressed that protecting the environment is a divine command, a religious duty, a moral responsibility. They also affirmed that Islam and Christianity exhort us to conserve, protect and sustain the environment.

At the grassroots, Madison Daniels, Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance’s faith community organiser, meets with various religious groups across the state about climate change action. He said it doesn’t matter how small the community is, “as long as (they) have a voice”.

In one local example, on 13 October 2022, ‘Faiths for Climate Justice Multifaith Services’ were held across Australia and the Pacific to support the launch of an open letter that calls on the Albanese Government to move beyond fossil fuels. St Patrick’s Cathedral in Sydney’s Parramatta hosted one such service. It was a moving example of different faiths coming together for a common cause, with a Muslim reciting the Azan and



a Jewish Rabbi chanting the Psalms in Hebrew inside a Catholic church, all in the name of responding to the challenge of climate change.

“More and more people recognise that climate change is a really serious threat,” says Rev Fletcher Harper, an Episcopalian minister and the executive director of the US interfaith climate organisation GreenFaith. “They are often immobilised by that threat because it feels too big or they’re afraid it will result in a difficult lifestyle change, or they just don’t know what to do. An organisation makes it possible for them to act. History changes when people get together to push.”

The power of interfaith collaboration today is action, not just talk. The importance of the Earth follows the same lines through many Christian denominations and other religions. It’s true, as well, for many who don’t identify with any particular faith. In the interfaith world, “world view” is used “to be as inclusive as possible”. That includes religious, spiritual or secular identities, at any point on the spectrum.

“While there’s a lot that exists to divide us (and) we all see the world from different vantage points, it doesn’t matter,” said Daniels. “The Earth is the common ground that we can all meet each other on and form a unity.”

“A reconnection to the planet, and a regrounding of our human experience is really the secret sauce missing from our religious, civic and emotional experiences.”

Diverse perspectives and expertise are essential to combatting climate change, allowing unique ideas and talents to contribute to a larger whole.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3NKD9pT.

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
28	29	30	31			

December 2022

- 08** Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Catholic Christian)
25 Christmas (Birth of Jesus Christ) (Western Christian)

January 2023

- 01** The Solemnity of Mary, Holy Mother of God (Catholic Christian)
06 Epiphany of the Lord (Christian)
07 Christmas (Birth of Jesus Christ) (Orthodox Christian)

February 2023

- 01-07** World Interfaith Harmony Week, worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com
04 UN International Day of Human Fraternity, un.org/en/observances/human-fraternity
18 *Al-Isra' w'al-Miraj* – The Night Journey and Ascent (of Prophet Muhammad) (Islam)
22 Ash Wednesday, Lenten fast begins (Western Christian)
27 Great Lent Begins (Orthodox Christian)

March 2023

- 08** International Women's Day, internationalwomensday.com
19 Bridge Day, thesydneystatement.org.au
21 Harmony Day, harmony.gov.au
22 Ramadan (tbc) (Islam)
25 Feast of the Annunciation (Catholic Christian)

April 2023

- 02** Palm Sunday (Christian)
07 Good Friday (Christian)
09 Easter Sunday – Resurrection of Jesus Christ (Christian)
21 *Eid al-Fitr* – The feast marking the end of Ramadan (tbc) (Islam)



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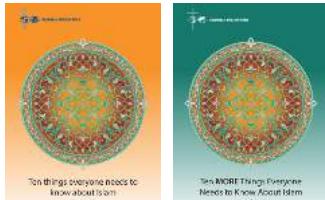
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December 2022