

Bridges

Building relationships between Christians and Muslims



No. 96 September 2022

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From the Editor

I love this photo. It shows Imam Farhan Khalil and I greeting each other. It was taken at a fundraiser for Together for Humanity at the NSW Art Gallery on 24 June 2022. Imam Farhan and I both support the great interfaith and intercultural awareness work that Together for Humanity do in schools. When called upon, we happily participate in those programs. Together with Rabbi Zalman Kastel, we have occasionally shared a panel as the proverbial Abrahamic religious trio, a rabbi, a priest and an imam (which is often the start of a joke!).

Although we have much in common, Imam Farhan and I are very different. Imam Farhan is a Muslim. I am a Christian. He is an Imam. I am a Catholic priest. He is religiously conservative. I am religiously liberal. He is from the UK with a Pakistani background. I am from Australia with an Irish background. His hair and beard are black with a tinge of grey. Mine are white with a tinge of black. Yet despite our many differences,

we are friends, and we both support our other mutual friend, Rabbi Zalman Kastel, and together we all promote interfaith and intercultural relations.

What I love about the photo is that it shows the evident friendship between us. It is in his laughing smile, my beaming response, the direct eye contact, the grasping of arms, the face-to-face encounter, and the sense of openness, welcome, and delight in each other's company. The photo exudes friendship.

I believe that this is the friendship to which Pope Francis, in his repeated calls for fraternity, is asking of Catholics, other Christians, believers in other religions, and all people of goodwill. In this present age, when we can all too easily get caught up in identity politics around culture, language, religion, race, nationality, it is all the more important to promote friendship across all these divides. Let us all live as sisters and brothers, under the one God, and be friends to each other.

REV DR PATRICK MCINERNEY



ACU-PISAI Lecture

In conjunction with *Laudato Si'* Week, the Australian Catholic University (ACU) and the Pontifical Institute for the Study of Arabic and Islamics (PISAI) held their annual joint lecture on 24 May 2022. The topic was, "Human Fraternity and Ecological Conversion: Muslims and Christians in Dialogue". **Rev Dr Patrick McNerney** and Dr Zuleyha Keskin (Charles Sturt University) joined online with Dr Emmanuel Nathan (ACU) in Rome. Emmanuel gave a Christian perspective; Zuleyha gave a Muslim perspective; and Patrick gave an interfaith perspective. *View the recording at: bit.ly/3vVldRI.*

Shoah Memorial Service

On Tuesday 31 May 2022, **Rev Dr Patrick McNerney** gave the keynote address at the Shoah Memorial Service arranged by the NSW Council of Christians and Jews and hosted at The Great Synagogue of Sydney. It was an extraordinary privilege, challenge and responsibility. It was the first time in many years that a Christian had been invited to give the address. It was a very daunting task. On previous occasions, survivors of the Shoah and children of survivors had spoken. Fr Patrick knew he could not match them. Instead, he told his own story of long being ignorant of Jews and Judaism, and the conversion that took place through personal meeting, reading and reflection. His talk was very well received by Jews and Christians. *It is available at: bit.ly/3Q6JJYq.*



Speaking Engagements

With the easing of COVID restrictions, **Rev Dr Patrick McNerney** has been busy with several important speaking engagements in 2022: On 18 May, he presented to the Clergy Conference of Parramatta on 'Mission, Dialogue as part of Mission, and Synodality'. He grounded the three themes in the dynamics of the Trinity. The clergy are vital for encouraging the interfaith apostolate in the 46 parishes of the diocese. On 26 May, he presented to the Mission Team of Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta on 'Mission, Interreligious Dialogue in Mission, and the work of CCCMR'. With 80 schools, 43,000 students and almost 5,000 staff, the leadership, teachers and students

of CEDP are mass allies in living and promoting interfaith across Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. On 22 June, over the course of the day, he presented to the staff and students of the Parramatta Diocese's Holy Spirit Seminary, Harris Park, on 'Tradition', 'Mission' and 'Synodality' (pictured), the common thread being openness to other expressions and to other people. **Kim Chong** and **Sam Cherian** also shared their experience of interreligious dialogue with the seminarians, who are future leaders in the diocese. On 24 June, he presented to the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine on 'Interreligious Dialogue' and 'Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations'. It was a great opportunity to share knowledge with the catechists and to listen to their lived experience of engaging at the grassroots. *If you would like Patrick to speak on interfaith dialogue at one of your events, contact the Centre at info.cccmr@columban.org.au.*



2022 Abraham Conference

On 14 August 2022, the Centre, along with partners from the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths, co-hosted the 2022 Abraham Conference at Amity College in Auburn, Sydney. This year's theme was 'Religion for the 21st Century: Recovering faith in Faith', which explored how religion, once a powerful social force, can restore its positive influence to help us collectively face issues of our current globalised, pluralist world. Exploring this with the audience were renowned journalist, radio and television presenter Geraldine Doogue, in conversation with veteran ABC broadcaster John Cleary, and three panellists from the Abrahamic faiths, Rabbi Moshe Givental, Rev Dr Rob McFarlane and Associate Professor Salim Farrar. It was a lively afternoon that stimulated much discussion among the audience during the

Conference and later over refreshments. *A reflection on the 2022 Abraham Conference by Christian panellist Rev Dr Rob MacFarlane can be read at bit.ly/3ThZR1e. A media report in AMUST can be read at bit.ly/3CmPcWn.*

Domestic and Family Violence Forum

On 16 June 2022, **Kim Chong** participated in a women's forum on multifaith perspectives on domestic and family violence. It was hosted by SydWest, ACU, and the Harman Foundation, a partner in the Western Sydney Women's IntHERfaith Initiative (WSWII). It consisted of a panel of speakers from the Christian, Sikh and Muslim faiths, as well as a police officer from the Blacktown unit who works with victims of domestic violence. Women of various faiths participated in round-table discussions on the subject. Domestic and family violence is a complex and challenging issue but one in which women need to feel seen and heard. Silence and shame can make it difficult to recognise how domestic and family violence permeates our social fabric. The more we discuss this openly, the more awareness is raised.



TOGETHER IN SPIRITUALITY

Fostering Interreligious Dialogue



MOHSEN ASHOURI
Temple Director
Australian Baha'i House of
Worship



OSMAN BOYACI
Youth Imam
Auburn Gallipoli
Mosque/ Youth Centre



SCOTT NELSON
MITRA Executive Team /
Co-host of Bodhinauts

THURSDAY, 16 JUNE
@ 7PM (AEDT)

REGISTER FREE
AT HUMANITIX




Youth PoWR Event: Together in Spirituality

On 16 June 2022, Youth PoWR hosted the final event of their series on the different forms of dialogue as seen in their interfaith charter, *The Sydney Statement*. Titled 'Together in Spirituality: Fostering Interreligious Dialogue', the event was designed to help the audience learn more about different places of worship and to share their spiritualities with each other. The panel consisted of Mohsen Ashouri, Temple Director of the Australian Baha'i House of Worship, Osman Boyaci, Youth Imam at Auburn Gallipoli Mosque, and Scott Nelson, who is on the Executive Board of MITRA, a Buddhist inter-university youth group. The speakers shared their religious experiences and briefly introduced their places of worship. They spoke passionately about how these experiences shaped their identity and strengthened their faith. Each talk was followed by a breakout room discussion in which the audience reflected on what they heard and shared their own spiritual journeys.



Saudi Arabia Leads Interfaith Understanding

From 11 to 12 May 2022, the Muslim World League hosted an interfaith forum on its home soil in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the first of its kind for the Muslim nation. Around 100 leaders from the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist faiths gathered at the forum to explore shared values and a common global vision for interfaith cooperation. The 'Forum on Common Values

among Religious Followers' featured panel discussions of international religious issues and offered opportunities to establish cross-cultural partnerships between faiths, and produced an official communiqué outlining fundamental agreements endorsed by all faiths represented. The communiqué reads, "The Forum's collective objectives were to reach a universal consensus within the context of a common civilizational vision to enhance cooperation and trust between global spiritual leaders, leverage their commonalities by placing them at the forefront of common principles of human values, promote the values of moderation and harmony, effectively support efforts to advance tolerance and peace, and set rational intellectual frameworks to immunise against the dangers of extremist ideology and behavior regardless of its source."

Read the final communiqué at bit.ly/3pf5IA1. Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3QznF86.

Desert Monastery Hub for Interfaith Re-opens

A Syrian desert monastery that was once a hub for interfaith dialogue, attracting tens of thousands of pilgrims, has reopened to visitors after more than a decade of war and isolation.

In 2010, 30,000 people visited Deir Mar Moussa Al-Habashi (St Moses the Ethiopian), a 7th century monastery perched atop a barren, rocky hill about 100 kilometres north of Damascus.

But the onset of civil war in 2011 and the disappearance of Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, who had led and revived the community since 1982, scared away visitors for nearly a decade. Dall'Oglio hosted interfaith seminars at the monastery, where the Christian minority and Muslims used to pray side by side, turning it into a symbol of coexistence that attracted visitors and worshippers for three decades. With security having improved in surrounding areas, the monastery reopened its doors to visitors this month. The head of the monastery, Fr Jihad Youssef, said: "We yearn for people to return. We want to see them pray and meditate with us once more, so that they may find here a space for calm, silence and contemplation."



Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3zUFSqe.



Council of Europe Supports Interreligious Dialogue

The Council of Europe has long recognised the interreligious as an important part of intercultural dialogue in a diverse and multicultural Europe. It has promoted interfaith dialogue through its various official organisations, encouraging religious communities to engage in promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

On 2 May 2022, the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers hosted an international conference, 'Interreligious Dialogue on Religion and Peace, Religion and Human Rights'. It brought together Catholic, Protestant and Reformed, Orthodox, Jewish and Muslim communities to re-launch dialogue among the leaders of these religious faiths. The discussion on religion, peace, human rights and law led to support of the *Strasbourg Principles for Interreligious Dialogue*, which will guide the Council's ongoing work in this important area. You can read the principles in full at bit.ly/3pgRmzo.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3cPlcqt.



Pakistani Journalist Wins Top Prize for Women's Empowerment and Religious Freedom Film

Pakistani journalist Zeenat Bibi has won the grand prize in the 2022 Women's Empowerment and Religious Freedom Film Competition for her short film, *She Stood Against Religious Extremism*. The competition explores how inclusivity and multi-faith living empowers women and leads to prosperous communities. Bibi's film is based on the true story of a young woman who engages in dialogue with young people from

different faiths to counter religious extremism in Peshawar, Pakistan. Bibi, 30, is also the founder of Genderlens.pk, the country's first woman-led digital news platform covering issues faced by women, religious minorities, and youth. "I have studied almost every major religion in the world, and every religion, including Islam, teaches humanity, respect, and harmony, so I decided to convey this lesson to our young generation [in an effort] to eliminate extremism and to promote harmony. I will continue my mission with energy and determination," she said. *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3PuWaMh.*

Timor-Leste Adopts Document on Human Fraternity

On 20 May 2022, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the inauguration of national independence in East Timor, President José Ramos-Horta took custody of his country's highest office for the second time. In the course of doing so he issued an official declaration in which he solemnly received the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* – signed on 4 February 2019 by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam Ahmad al-Tayyeb of Al-Azhar (pictured) – as a national document. He vowed to make "every effort, in cooperation with state, religious and secular institutions, to adapt and include it in the national school curricula". The official act is legally based on resolution no. 11/2022, unanimously approved by the East Timor National Parliament on 12 May, in which the legislative assembly of the country expressed its full adherence to the Abu Dhabi document and committed the state to it, in its various articulations. *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3wax3Y3.*



Firsts among Muslim Federal Parliamentarians

The Albanese Labor government, newly elected on 21 May 2022, includes two Muslim ministers, a first in Australian history. Mr Ed Husic (top left) became the Minister for Industry and Science. Dr Anne Aly (top right) took on the outer ministry roles of Minister for Early Childhood Education and the Minister for Youth. Husic and Aly said that they recognise the symbolic significance of their appointments but insist they're focused on now using these roles to make a difference in the lives of Australians. The first hijab-wearing person to be elected to parliament is a new Labor senator for Western Australia, Fatima Payman (bottom left), who has cultural roots in Afghanistan. The first Muslim woman to enter any Australian parliament was Pakistani-born Mehreen Saeed Faruqi (bottom right), when she joined the NSW Legislative Council in June 2013. She was also Australia's first Muslim senator in Federal Parliament in 2018; and now first Muslim elected to senior leadership in a political party.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3SFeuox.



Plenary Council Endorses Interfaith Relations

by Rev Dr Patrick McInerney

After years of consultations, hundreds of hours of meetings, weeks and months of drafting and editing multiple versions of various documents, and individual and communal discernment prior to and during two Assemblies, Decree 3 of the Plenary Council, *Called by Christ, Sent Forth as Missionary Disciples*, formally endorsed interreligious dialogue as part of the evangelising mission of the Catholic Church in Australia.

On our Catholic responsibility to build relationships of respect and compassion, the explanatory theological introduction states:

Missionary discipleship is participation in Jesus' own mission; it is characterised by openness to encounter, hospitality and dialogue with each other, other Christians, people of faith and no faith, and with the human family for the care of our common home. (par. 7)

On the universal communion that we Catholics are to seek with all people, and on the way to achieve it, the same introduction states:

... In this spirit of mission [which includes both interreligious dialogue and proclamation of God's saving work in Christ], dioceses, eparchies, and parishes are to commit to building friendly and co-operative relationships with other Christians, communities of other religious traditions and people with no religion, and to promote and engage in the four forms of interreligious dialogue: dialogues of life, action, theological exchange, and religious experience (Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, n. 42). (par. 10)

To implement interreligious dialogue in the church in Australia, the Plenary Council passed with overwhelming support the following two motions which form Article 3 of the Decree:

- a. That each diocese and eparchy identify ways of promoting ecumenical and interfaith relationships (e.g., an Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer) that are practical and appropriate for the diocese or eparchy.
- b. That the Bishops Commission for Christian Unity and Inter-religious Dialogue – in collaboration with Catholic tertiary institutions and theological associations – provide guidance, advice and resources to dioceses and eparchies for ecumenical and interfaith



Rev Dr Patrick McInerney, Peritus, and Rev Fr Trevor Trotter, Member, at the Second General Assembly of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia in Sydney, 3-9 July 2022.

Rev Dr Patrick McInerney was one of 20 Periti (Advisors) at the Plenary Council. His address to the Assembly on "Missionary Discipleship" on the second day was widely acclaimed as inspirational, laying the foundation for a contemporary understanding of mission. Read his text at bit.ly/3cYSt3L.

dialogue and relationships, and formation for those responsible for ecumenical and interreligious relations.

Some dioceses already have interfaith commissions. Many do not. I am delighted that last year Bishop Vincent Long (re-)established the Interfaith Commission of the Diocese of Parramatta. Although the members were not able to meet last year due to COVID restrictions, the Commission is now up and running. I will support them as much as I can, as I believe that the Commission is the best way to ensure that interfaith relations are promoted in parishes, schools and other diocesan organisations and can have enduring impact. I hope that the many dioceses indicated earlier will follow Bishop Vincent's example.

May all Australian Catholics, individually and communally, implement the Plenary Council's missionary commitment to fraternal/sororal relations with believers from other faiths.

Incidentally, as witness from another part of the world to the importance of interreligious dialogue, on 28 June 2022, just five days before the start of the 2nd Assembly of the Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Australia, the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the US formally endorsed a 'Theological Rationale for Interreligious and Interfaith Relationships'.

For commentary, see: bit.ly/3zGOa5v.
For the Rationale, see: bit.ly/3OQE5Yx.

Interreligious Dialogue Built on Respect

Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue hold plenary session

The Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, the new name of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, held its Plenary Session in Rome from 6-8 June 2022 on the theme, 'Interreligious Dialogue and Conviviality'. Bishop Michael McKenna, Chair of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference's Commission for Christian Unity and Inter-Religious Relations, participated. Pope Francis addressed the participants and received them in audience.

Without dialogue, respect for differences and a recognition that all people have struggles and dreams, divisions and even violence between people will continue, Pope Francis said.

"Our increasingly interconnected world is not fraternal and convivial, far from it!" said the pope as he welcomed members of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue.

Pope Francis told the group he was especially pleased to welcome them the day after Pentecost because it was on Pentecost in 1964 that St Paul VI announced the formation of the dicastery's predecessor, the Secretariat for Non-Christians.

"How far the Spirit has come in almost 60 years," the pope said. His predecessor was inspired to recognise the importance of the church's involvement in dialogue given the rapid increase of ties "between people and communities of different cultures, languages and religions – an aspect of what we now call globalisation".

The importance of the dicastery has not lessened, he said. "On the contrary, globalisation and the acceleration of international communications make dialogue in general and interreligious dialogue, in particular, a crucial question."

The plenary session was focusing on "conviviality", a choice Pope Francis praised because it focuses on the concrete experience of people, with all their similarities and differences, living together.

As a service of the church, he said, this dicastery has the mission of promoting "with other believers, in a fraternal and convivial way, the journey of the search for God, considering people of other religions not abstractly, but concretely, as having a history, desires, wounds, dreams.



Bishop Michael McKenna is greeted by Pope Francis prior to the commencement of the the Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue held in Rome from 6-8 June 2022.

"Only in this way, can we build together a habitable world for all, in peace," he said.

"Faced with the succession of crises and conflicts, 'some people attempt to flee from reality, taking refuge in their own little world; others react to it with destructive violence. Yet between selfish indifference and violent protest there is always another possible option: that of dialogue'," he said, quoting from *Fratelli Tutti*, his 2020 encyclical.

"Conviviality", he said, means recognising and giving value to the unique identity and beliefs of each person. "In this sense, it has political relevance as an alternative to social fragmentation and conflict," he said. "I encourage all of you to cultivate the spirit and style of conviviality in your relationships with people of other religious traditions – we need it so much today in the church and in the world."

To those who object to such openness, Pope Francis replied that "the Lord Jesus fraternised with everyone, he spent time with people who were considered sinful and unclean, he shared the table of publicans without prejudice. And during a convivial meal (the Last Supper), he showed himself as the faithful servant and friend to the end, and then as the risen one, the living one who gives us the grace of universal conviviality."

Condensed and adapted from 'Pope: Interreligious dialogue is built on respect, sharing', by Cindy Wooden, Crux, bit.ly/3BvUSqI. For full text of Pope's speech, see: bit.ly/3oKuBn4. For Bishop Michael McKenna's intervention, see: bit.ly/3OMSbKA.

Blessed Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916) Canonised

St Charles de Foucauld's approach to mission exemplifies fraternal love

On 15 May 2022, Pope Francis canonised French mystic Charles de Foucauld, a former soldier who lived in the North African desert for many years, devoting his life to the indigenous Tuareg peoples.

Viscount Charles de Foucauld was born into a proudly aristocratic family in Strasbourg, France, in 1858. Orphaned at the age of six, he was raised by his grandfather, a retired army colonel, who steered him toward a military career. Army life did not suit him. He graduated from the academy at the bottom of his class and earned a reputation as a decadent playboy. Posted to Algeria, he was dismissed from the army following a scandal in which he tried to pass off his mistress as the Viscountess de Foucauld.

The saving benefit from his military service was a fascination with the North African desert, to which he returned under the aegis of the French Geographical Society to undertake a dangerous exploration of Morocco. It was there that the experience of Muslim piety helped promote in Charles a dramatic recovery of his Catholic faith, changing his character and his life forever. "As soon as I believed that there was a God," he later wrote, "I understood that I could not do anything other than live for him. My religious vocation dates from the same moment as my faith."

A pilgrimage through the Holy Land, following the footsteps of Jesus in the actual towns and countryside where he had walked, made a profound impact. Afterward Foucauld entered the Trappists and spent a number of years in a monastery in Syria. After seeking ordination, he returned to Algeria, to the oasis of Béni-Abbès on the border of Morocco. His goal was to develop a new model of religious life, a community of Little Brothers, who would live among the poor in a spirit of service and prayerful solidarity. He later sought greater solitude in Tamanrasset, a small outpost in the rugged Hoggar. It was there, on 1 December 1916, that he met his death, killed by Tuareg rebels.

By any conventional standard, the life of Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916) – soldier, explorer, monk and ultimately desert hermit – ended in failure. At the time of his violent death in a remote corner of the Sahara, he had published none of his spiritual writings; he had founded no congregation, nor attracted any followers.

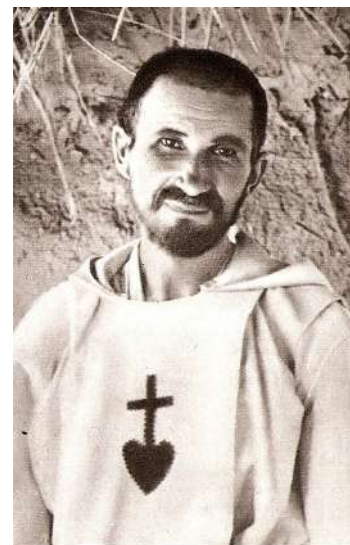
He could not claim responsibility for a single conversion. And yet his witness endured. Many regard him as one of the great spiritual figures of the 20th century, a prophet whose message speaks more clearly to the challenges of our time than it did in his own.

Foucauld's approach to mission is particularly significant. In contrast to the triumphalistic models of his day, Foucauld exemplified what has come to be known as an evangelism of presence, a willingness to encounter people of other faiths on a basis of equality and mutual respect. Although his asceticism was extreme by the standards of most missionaries, he essentially embraced the poverty of his neighbours. Foucauld wanted to bear witness to the Gospel by living it, by being a friend and brother to all.

Today, Charles de Foucauld is regarded as a pioneer of interreligious dialogue, witnessing to his faith through his quiet example, without words, living it out through deep prayer and friendship and service to the people he came to know. Pope Francis referred to the example of Charles de Foucauld in his 2020 encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*. Pope Francis writes:

"Blessed Charles directed his ideal of total surrender to God towards an identification with the poor, abandoned in the depths of the African desert. In that setting, he expressed his desire to feel himself a brother to every human being, and asked a friend to "pray to God that I truly be the brother of all". He wanted to be, in the end, "the universal brother". Yet only by identifying with the least did he come at last to be the brother of all." (*Fratelli Tutti*, 286-287)

The dream of Blessed Charles is the same one that God inspired in Francis of Assisi. It is an ideal that involves a path of transformation within us, to make us feel ourselves to be brothers, sisters and friends of all, just like these saints. *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3vRAGC4 and bit.ly/3CeoQWT.*



Belonging – Affirmations for Faith Leaders

WCC, Religions for Peace release joint message on statelessness

On 6 May 2022, after years of consultations, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Religions for Peace issued a joint message on statelessness, *Belonging – Affirmations for Faith Leaders*.

“In many contexts globally, stateless people live in religiously diverse societies,” notes the message. “Interfaith cooperation is therefore essential as we work to eradicate statelessness.”

The message observes that, although the world’s major religious traditions are each distinct and beautifully unique, with different sacred texts and ethical perspectives, they do share common values of solidarity, cooperation, equality and non-discrimination.

“Interfaith cooperation is essential for peaceful and sustainable societies, because it enables us to hold up shared values that are common across traditions in view of finding common ground for word and action,” reads the message. “In a world scarred by the evils of injustice, discrimination, inequality and poverty, we offer these shared interfaith affirmations on belongingness as we strive together to address and eradicate statelessness.”

The affirmations first recognise the special plight of stateless persons.

“Bereft of the nationality of any country, stateless people are made vulnerable and are pushed to the margins of society, with minimal or no access to the basic human rights needed to live a dignified and fulfilling life,” reads the message. “Our traditions affirm the dignity of every human being and the oneness of our human family.”

The message also emphasises that shared teachings must become the basis of advocacy to end statelessness.

“Our understanding of the impacts of exclusion and discrimination must awaken us to the suffering of those who are stateless, both within and outside our faith communities,” reads the message. “We affirm that human beings should not have to flee their homes to enjoy basic rights and to have a sense of belongingness.”

The text urges that everyone should feel secure and at home in our world.



A group of Oromo IDPs walk on the dry riverbed near Burka Dare IDP site in Seweyna woreda (admin unit), Bale Zone, Ethiopia.

“We recognise the special vulnerability of women and girls in stateless circumstances and celebrate their contribution to life: including life-bearers and caregivers, and contributors to public service, among many other capacities,” reads the message. “When stateless, women bear a disproportionate burden of discrimination.”

The message affirms that children always belong and should never become victims of statelessness. “Children are the expressions of innocence and hope,” reads the message. “Stateless children inherit a world they did not create but that rejects them.”

WCC director for International Affairs Peter Prove remarked: “Statelessness, though by definition a hidden problem, is in many respects a threshold issue for the promotion and protection of all human rights, with the right to a nationality effectively being the right to have rights. We therefore very much welcome this expression of interreligious partnership in addressing this fundamental challenge.”

The text shares a commitment to cultivate the spiritual will and moral consciousness to translate the best values of our faith traditions into intentional actions for transformation. “We refuse to surrender to suffering as having the final say,” concludes the text. “May we find practical ways to support these sacred truths, so that all belong and know that they have a place of peace and security where they enjoy all fundamental human rights.”

For full text of the Affirmations, see: bit.ly/3S95SWW.

Condensed and adapted from WCC, bit.ly/3BqMTRU.

Census 2021 Data Shows Australians are Less Religious

Australians choosing “no religion” on census rises by nearly 10 per cent

The latest census results released in July 2022 indicates that the number of Australians who selected “no religion” has risen to 38.9 per cent, up from 30.1 per cent in 2016 (Barker, 2022). The first tranche of data from the 2021 census, released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), shows that those who identify as Christians have decreased from 52 per cent in 2016 to 44 per cent in 2021 (Knott & Thomson, 2022).

The proportion of Australians identifying as Catholic declined from 23 to 20 per cent over the past five years while self-identified Anglicans dropped from 13 to 10 per cent. Based on current trends, non-believers could overtake Christians as the biggest religious bloc by the time the next census is conducted in 2026 (Knott & Thomson, 2022). The ABS says migration has affected the trend since, though much of the change is due to the growth of atheist and secular beliefs (Mannheim, 2022).

When people choose a religious affiliation in the national Census, it is a statement of identity. “We go wrong if we confuse this identity statement with how ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ people are,” said Dr Ruth Powell, Director of NCLS Research. This is evident from the results of the 2021 Australian Community Survey (2021 ACS), run by NCLS Research in November 2021, which show that 55 per cent of Australians say they believe in God, six in 10 pray or meditate, and two in 10 (21 per cent) attend religious services at least monthly (NCLS Research, 2022).

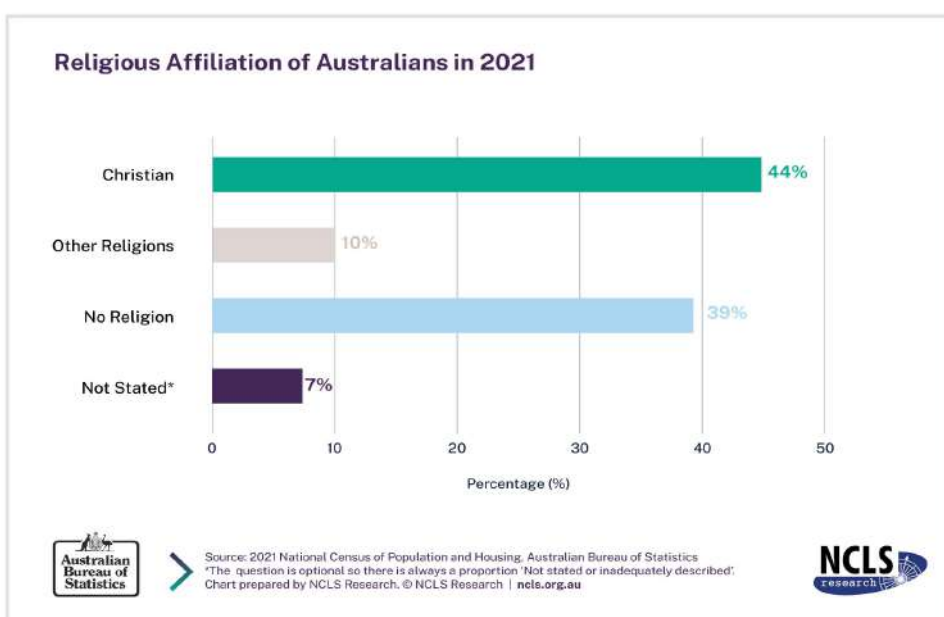
Dr Powell also noted that the increased affiliation to other religions, such as Hinduism and Islam, was indicative of Australia’s multicultural migrant population. The number of people who identified as Hindu in the census surged by 55 per cent over the past five years, constituting 2.7 per cent of the population, reflecting an influx of migrants from countries such as India and Nepal.

Islam’s share of the national population has grown to 3.2 per cent from 2.6 per cent in 2016 (Knott & Thomson, 2022). It is important to remember that a large portion of the population still identify with a religion. It is also important to note that Australia’s religious diversity is increasing.

As Renae Barker, senior lecturer in law at the University of Western Australia and an Honorary Research Fellow at the Centre for Muslim States and Societies, noted in 2017: “In the battle for supremacy between the “nones” and Christianity, we must also be conscious of minority faiths which in 2016 made up 8.2 per cent of the Australian population. For small and emerging faith groups, whose beliefs and practices may not be well understood in Australia, there is always a real risk of policy decisions affecting their religious beliefs and practices unintentionally or as the result of misunderstanding.”

It is therefore important to have a robust and respectful debate about freedom of religion and the place of religion in secular Australia. Part of the answer may lie in a balanced Religious Discrimination Act. It will also lie in respectful conversations about law reform. This must include those of minority faiths, those of the majority Christian faith, and those of no faith (Barker, 2022).

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3QyfxjB, ab.co/3paQCf1 and bit.ly/3zPHrW5.



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			

September 2022

- 01** World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation (Catholic & Orthodox Christian)
justiceandpeace.org.au/world-day-of-prayer-for-the-care-of-creation
creationjustice.org/world-day-of-prayer-for-the-care-of-creation
- 08** Birth of the Virgin Mary (Catholic Christian)
- 11** *Nayrouz* (New Year) (Coptic Christian)
- 16** *Arbaeen* (Ends 40-day mourning following Ashura) (Shia Islam)
- 21** International Day of Peace, United Nations un.org/en/observances/international-day-peace
- 25** World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Vatican migrants-refugees.va/world-day-of-migrants-refugees
- 26** International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, United Nations
un.org/en/observances/nuclear-weapons-elimination-day

October 2022

- 07** *Mawlid al-Nabi* (Birth of the Prophet) (Islam)
- 23** Mission Sunday (Catholic)

November 2022

- 01** All Saints' Day (Christian)
- 02** All Souls' Day (Christian)
- 16** International Day for Tolerance, United Nations unesco.org/en/days/tolerance-day
- 18** White Ribbon Day, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women
- 27** First Sunday of Advent (Christian)

December 2022

- 08** Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Catholic Christian)



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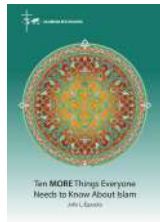
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