From the Editor: Let us live by faith, not fear!

Lately I have been thinking about fear. Many people seem to be living in fear. There is fear of terrorism. There is fear of refugees. There is fear of Islam and Muslims. There is fear of Catholic priests. There is fear of the consequences of legalising same-sex marriage. There is fear of not doing so. There is fear of nuclear war. There is fear of anything or anyone ‘other’. Accordingly, people protect themselves by building defences, by erecting walls, by isolating themselves, even by arming themselves.

Yes, terrible assaults do happen, violence erupts, tragedies strike, but statistically, most of us, most of the time, in most places, will not be victims of what we fear. Our fears are out of proportion to the actual threat. Sheathed in our defences, we are more victims of our fears than of any assault, for the very defences we erect against perceived threats also shut us off from life-enhancing possibilities. Our horizons shrink. We become closed-in and narrow-minded.

Christians and Muslims both profess to live by faith in God. As such, we live in the infinite horizon of God’s providence. Nothing is beyond God’s care. All is under God’s control. We know that God works all things to our good. We know that even if bad things happen, God can bring good out of them. God is the assurance that good ultimately triumphs over evil.

For Muslims, God is all-powerful, all-merciful, all-just, and will raise us on the last day to merciful judgement, when all wrongs will be righted and all rights will be rewarded. For Christians, God is all-loving, of which the crucified and risen Christ is the ultimate proof, and is already pouring out resurrected life on all creation through the Spirit in anticipation of future consummation.

As people of faith then, Christians and Muslims need not fear. Nothing can separate us from God. Nothing can threaten the abiding peace that God brings. Let us live by faith then, not fear, and together transform our world to be the place of welcome, hospitality, justice and peace that God wills.

Muslims this year celebrated the birth of the Prophet Muhammad on 29 November 2017. Christians will celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ on 25 December 2017 and Eastern Orthodox Christians on 7 January 2018. I wish all our readers, Christian and Muslim alike, a blessed feast day and every blessing in the New Year.

Patrick McInerney
Editor
Interfaith relations in the West
In October, Fr Patrick McInerney gave talks in the Mandurah and Cathedral Parishes in the Diocese of Bunbury and at the Centre for Faith Enrichment in the Archdiocese of Perth.

Under the title of ‘Christian-Muslim Relations, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow’, he presented the basics of Islam (life of the Prophet, Qur’an, Sunna, Shari’a, Pillars, Beliefs), encounters with Christians, commonalities and differences, and reasons for reaching out in dialogue with our Muslim sisters and brothers.

His informative and positive accounts were very well received. Fr Patrick visited the Perth Mosque Open Day, where he met seven people who had attended his talk the previous day – his message was bearing fruit already!

Witnessing to Christian-Muslim friendship
On 19 October, Fr Patrick McInerney and his good friend, Mazen Zreika, co-presented on Christian-Muslim Encounter to the ‘Living Faiths’ class at Morling College. They not only talked about, but gave living witness to, Christian-Muslim friendship. Their friendly engagement with each other extended out to conversations with the class and their lecturer, Rev Dr Darrell Jackson. Since Morling is the Baptist theological college for training ministers, the conversation was ecumenical as well as interfaith! Mazen’s sense of humour ensured a lively conversation.

Points that connect Christianity and Islam
On 28-29 September, Fr Patrick McInerney attended the conference, ‘The Impact of Jesus of Nazareth: Historical, Theological & Pastoral Perspectives’, hosted by the Sydney College of Divinity and the Catholic Institute of Sydney.

Most scholars presented Christian perspectives, but he broadened the scope by presenting ‘Jesus in Islam’. Although there are irreconcilable differences in the respective understandings of Jesus in Christianity and Islam, he presented the Prophet Muhammad’s encounters with Christians and the titles and roles of “Isa” (the Islamic name for Jesus) as points of connectivity for developing sympathy and friendship with Muslims.

Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald lecture
About 80 people attended a public lecture by Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald on 9 September at the Gleeson Auditorium at Australian Catholic University’s Strathfield Campus. Archbishop Fitzgerald is the former President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and retired Apostolic Nuncio to the Arab Republic of Egypt and Delegate to the League of Arab States. He currently lives in Jerusalem.

The topic was ‘Christian-Muslim Relations in the 21st Century’. An Islamic response was given by Associate Professor Salih Yucel, Fethullah Gulen Chair in the Study of Islam and Muslim-Catholic Relations at ACU. The MC for the evening was Dr Mahsheed Ansari, who facilitated an audience Q&A. Among the guests was Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay of the Maronite Diocese of Australia.

The evening was co-hosted by Affinity Intercultural Foundation, Australian Catholic University, Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay, Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations, Diocese of Parramatta, Islamic Sciences and Research Academy (ISRA), and Uniting Church in Australia NSW & ACT Synod.

We have moved to Blacktown - Please note our new address
The Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations has moved to a new office in Blacktown in the Diocese of Parramatta. Following the closure of the Columban Mission Institute in September, we believe our work of building Christian-Muslim relations will be better located in Western Sydney. The centre’s Director, Fr Patrick McInerney, is available to give talks and run educational seminars for schools, teachers, parishes and other community groups.

Contact us at: Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations, c/o Institute for Mission, 1-5 Marion Street, Blacktown, NSW, 2148
Email: info.cccmr@columban.org.au www.columban.org.au

Join us on facebook - https://www.facebook.com/ChristianMuslimRelations.CMI
News From the World

Religious minorities ‘need protection’
Archbishop Paul R Gallagher, Vatican foreign minister and former Apostolic Nuncio to Australia, told the UN General Assembly the “revolting reality” of recent wars shows just how urgent it is that the international community acts to protect religious minorities in situations of conflict.

During a UN session on 22 September 2017, Archbishop Gallagher listed strategies that are essential for stopping the persecution of religious minorities, including: blocking the flow of money and weapons to those who intend to target and harm religious minorities; dialogue between religious followers to overcome the assumption that interreligious conflicts are unavoidable; and confronting and condemning the abuse of religion to justify terrorism and the killing of innocent people in the name of God.

Pope invites leaders to ‘have a style of peace’
Religious leaders are called to practice “a style of peace, with words that differentiate themselves from the narrative of fear and with gestures that oppose the rhetoric of hatred,” Pope Francis said in an address to the Korean Council of Religious Leaders in the Vatican on 2 September 2017. “The world is watching us ... she asks us for common answers and commitments,” the pope said, calling for dialogue to be “open and respectful at the same time; only in this way will it be fruitful.” “Open, that is to say warm and sincere, carried forward by persons willing to walk together with esteem and honesty. Respectful, because mutual respect is at once the condition and the goal of interreligious dialogue: indeed it is in respecting the right to life, physical integrity and fundamental freedoms, such as those of conscience, religion, thought and expression, that the foundations are laid for building peace, for which each of us is called to pray and work.”

Call to use another term than non-Muslim
A Muslim scholar has suggested that Malaysians stop using the term “non-Muslims” to refer to people whose religion is not Islam. Malaysia’s Daily Express reported on 24 October 2017 that USA-based Dr Mohamed Elsanousi said it was more appropriate to refer to them collectively as people of other faiths, or by their respective religion. “One can argue they are in fact non-Muslims but we must always be mindful that they too have their own faith,” he said. Dr Elsanousi is the Director of the Secretariat of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, a global network initiated by the UN Mediation Support Unit. He said that referring to people of other faiths as non-Muslims could create a perception that Muslims are superior. He said this should not be the practice in a multi-religious and multi-racial country like Malaysia. “The people must always send out a message of mutual respect, and that no religion is superior to the other.”

Source: Daily Express, see https://goo.gl/5hBAk2

Teens from 3 faiths bond for the environment
An interfaith environmental project to create a Peace Garden stone, which will be divided and distributed to an area church, mosque and temple, brought together teens from three different faith communities at the Brock Environmental Center in Virginia Beach, VA, USA. The teens came from Ohef Sholom Temple, the Islamic Center of Tidewater, and All Saints Episcopal Church for the Peace Garden Project.

They explored local issues, such as oyster restoration, pollutants of the watershed and personal behaviours that can make a difference to local environments. They also created a large, concrete mosaic designed with three sections called a peace stone, which was unveiled on 27 August 2017.

Source: https://goo.gl/yVTbX4

Teens created a Peace Garden stone at the Brock Environmental Center in Virginia Beach.
Photo: Irene Bowers | For The Virginian-Pilot

Source: CNS, see https://goo.gl/sZP3Xj
The Southern Poverty Law Centre in the USA has published a guide that sets out 10 principles for fighting hate in your community.

1. ACT
Do something. In the face of hatred, apathy will be interpreted as acceptance by the perpetrators, the public, and — worse — the victims. Community members must take action; if we don’t, hate persists.

2. JOIN FORCES
Reach out to allies from churches, schools, clubs, and other civic groups. Create a diverse coalition. Include children, police, and the media. Gather ideas from everyone, and get everyone involved.

3. SUPPORT THE VICTIMS
Hate crime victims are especially vulnerable. If you’re a victim, report every incident — in detail — and ask for help. If you learn about a hate crime victim in your community, show support. Let victims know you care. Surround them with comfort and protection.

4. SPEAK UP
Hate must be exposed and denounced. Help news organizations achieve balance and depth. Do not debate hate group members in conflict-driven forums. Instead, speak up in ways that draw attention away from hate, toward unity.

5. EDUCATE YOURSELF
An informed campaign improves its effectiveness. Determine if a hate group is involved, and research its symbols and agenda. Understand the difference between a hate crime and a bias incident.
6. CREATE AN ALTERNATIVE
Do not attend a hate rally. Find another outlet for anger and frustration and for people’s desire to do something. Hold a unity rally or parade to draw media attention away from hate.

7. PRESSURE LEADERS
Elected officials and other community leaders can be important allies. But some must overcome reluctance — and others, their own biases — before they’re able to take a stand.

8. STAY ENGAGED
Promote acceptance and address bias before another hate crime can occur. Expand your comfort zone by reaching out to people outside your own groups.

9. TEACH ACCEPTANCE
Bias is learned early, often at home. Schools can offer lessons of tolerance and acceptance. Host a diversity and inclusion day on campus. Reach out to young people who may be susceptible to hate group propaganda and prejudice.

10. DIG DEEPER
Look inside yourself for biases and stereotypes. Commit to disrupting hate and intolerance at home, at school, in the workplace and in faith communities.

This section of ‘Ten Ways to Fight Hate: a community resource guide’ is republished with permission from the Southern Poverty Law Center based in Montgomery, Alabama, USA. To download a copy of the resource, see www.splcenter.org

21 March each year. It’s a day where all Australians celebrate our cultural diversity. Image: Wikimedia by DIAC images – Harmony Day.

The launch of Australia’s Multicultural Statement in 2017. Image: Wikimedia by Federation of Indian Associations of ACT-FINACT.


A small group of pro-Confederate supporters and other counter-protesters in a mostly peaceful manner in Richmond, Virginia, in 2017. Image: Wikimedia by Mobilus In Mobili.
A Common Word, Ten Years On:
Christians and Muslims must work together for peace

On 13 October 2007, 138 Muslim leaders signed *A Common Word Between Us and You* a document stating that Christians and Muslims share two great commandments - love of God and love of neighbour - and should work for peace together.

Now 10 years later, the influence of the document continues through the projects and relationships it inspired, but experts on Muslim-Christian relations say many people still need to hear its message.

“When Catholics in the USA are hearing about Islam and Muslims, they’re not hearing about the heart and soul of the tradition,” said Scott Alexander, director of the Catholic-Muslim studies program at the Catholic Theological Union. “They’re hearing about different events in which there was conflict or if ISIS sponsored some sort of terrorist attack.”

*A Common Word* “gives people a way to see that Muslims are taking action all the time on the local and global stage for the good of humanity,” he said. “The actions of a relatively small minority get so much more publicity that it leads to people having a distorted image of Islam and Muslims.”

Prior to the publication of *A Common Word*, Pope Benedict XVI in a 2006 address at the *University of Regensburg* quoted a 14th Century Byzantine emperor who said that Muhammad only contributed “things evil and inhuman”, such as spreading his faith by violence.

While the pope did not endorse the emperor’s view, the Regensburg address provoked outrage from Muslims. Amir Hussain, professor of theological studies at Loyola Marymount University, said it was also the “impetus” for *A Common Word*.

The authors of *A Common Word* could have written about how offensive and concerning the pope’s words were, Amir Hussain said, but instead they took a positive approach and wrote about the connections between Muslims and Christians. The signers also overcame divisions within their own religion to present a unified message.

The document was directed to major Christian leaders, including Pope Benedict, Orthodox patriarchs and the leaders of major Protestant churches.

The authors began by asserting that “the future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians” and that “the basis for this peace and understanding” is already part of the faiths’ “foundational principles.”

The next two sections present and analyse evidence from the Quran and the Bible that Muslims and Christians share these “foundational principles,” specifically love of God and love of neighbour. In the last section, the authors present the scriptural basis for interfaith dialogue.

John Esposito, the founding director of the Alwaleed Center for Muslim Christian Understanding at Georgetown University, said the heavy emphasis on Scripture made the document especially convincing.

“Because it comes from the Scriptures, one has to say this is God’s command,” rather than dismissing it as an individual theologian’s idea, he said. “The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians. The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour.” (*A Common Word*)

Although Christians did not publish a joint response, the website of *A Common Word* lists 71 responses from Christian leaders and scholars, including Pope Benedict.

Scott Alexander said the document “spawned a number of important personal and inter-institutional relationships” that are still important today.

“Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works,” the authors add. “Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill.” (*A Common Word*)

“While there are forces of violence in Islam,” Alexander said, in *A Common Word* “an extraordinary group of Islamic leaders has called for peace and cooperation.”

To read the full article by Maria Benevento in the National Catholic Reporter, see https://goo.gl/vwyFkX
Walk on Earth Gently
A Multi-Faith invitation to Sustainable Lifestyles

The statement, Walk on Earth Gently, A Multi-Faith invitation to Sustainable Lifestyles was delivered to last month's COP23 by faith leaders and people of faith from all over the world. To all members of the human family and to leaders gathered at COP23:

We extend our warm greetings. We represent the world’s family of spiritualities, faiths and religions who share a profound gratitude for our precious planet.

Earth is a blessing. She supports life and is the basis of all our economies. She conveys beauty and evokes our recognition of something greater than ourselves. She is our temple, our mosque, our sanctuary, our cathedral. Our home.

Our actions now threaten the delicate balance of life on Earth, with climate change posing a most grave danger. Record numbers of severe storms, droughts, fires, and related catastrophes leave trauma and grief in their wake. Recent months have witnessed the tragedy of such occurrences in the Caribbean, the USA, and India. We shudder over the enormity of this suffering and over what more lies ahead.

For thousands of years, our traditions have taught us to care for Earth. This responsibility has become urgent in recent decades. Our misuse of Earth’s generosity, while improving conditions for many, is not improving them for all and is fraying the web of life. The most vulnerable among us, those least responsible for this global threat, suffer the impacts of a warming climate unfairly and unjustly.

We have begun to respond, raising consciousness and starting to consume more sustainably. We have implored leaders to act. We have studied, prayed and petitioned, advocated, marched and mobilised. We have awakened to the urgent challenge and begun to change our ways.

However, we are at a crossroads. The Paris Agreement affirmed limiting temperature rise to well below 2⁰C, while pursuing efforts to a far safer 1.5⁰C limit. Our friends from Fiji and small island states, understanding the stakes and underscoring the science, have told us “1.5 to stay alive.” Yet we are currently headed for warming of 3⁰C or more, perilously beyond this limit. This challenge is both dire and urgent. It calls for us to act.

As religious and spiritual leaders, we are committing to make changes in our own lives, and to support the members of our communities in doing the same. Together, we come to you with an invitation to embark on a journey towards compassionate simplicity for the sake of the climate, the human family, and the community of life. For many of us, changes in three areas make the greatest impact: dramatically reducing emissions from our home energy use, adopting a plant-based diet and reducing food waste, and minimising automobile and air travel. Because of the gravity of our situation, substantial and long-term changes in these areas are indispensable if we are to reach a 1.5⁰C future, particularly for those of us in communities whose carbon footprints exceed sustainable levels. We pledge our commitment to such change.

Through this collective effort, we look forward to creating a global community of conscience and practice in which we learn to put belief into action in relation to our own lifestyles. Our spiritual and faith communities will give us hope and companions for this journey. We will share ideas, materials, and stories of struggle and success. Our practices of mindfulness, spiritual discipline and prayer will enable us to grow. These ancient teachings and practices, and our renewed commitments and willingness to strive, will help us build pathways towards a sustainable future.

We wish to be clear that we understand that systemic change is required to solve this crisis. We will continue to advocate for the policies that are so urgently needed. However, we also believe that individual commitments and behaviours are as important in addressing climate change as they are in addressing poverty, racism, and other grave social ills. And we know that our spiritualities and traditions offer wisdom about finding happiness in a purposeful life, family and friendships, not in an overabundance of things. The world needs such wisdom; it is our privilege both to share and to seek to embody it.

We invite you to join the many others willing to walk this path by adding your name to this document, and by preparing to make commitments in the three areas named above. The diverse groups coming together in this moment will reach out to invite you to become involved in a programme of support and action which will take shape over the coming year.

Let us pray and hope we can come together in love for each other, those who suffer from climate change, future generations, and planet Earth.

Let us commit to walk gently on Earth.

COP23 is the informal name for the 23rd Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which took place in Bonn, Germany, from 6-17 November 2017.

Full text, see https://goo.gl/cJ253B
What’s coming up

23 November: *Feast of Saint Columban* - (Catholic Christian)
29 November: *Mawlid al-Nabi* - (The birth of the Prophet) (Islam)
03 December: *1st Sunday of Advent* - (Christian)
08 December: *The Immaculate Conception of Mary* - (Catholic Christian)
25 December: *Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ* - (Western Christian)

2018

01 January: *Feast of Mary, Mother of God* - (Catholic Christian)
07 January: *Christmas* - (Eastern Orthodox)

01-7 February: *World Interfaith Harmony Week* - (UN)
14 February: *Ash Wednesday (start of Lent)* - (Catholic Christian)
08 March: *International Women’s Day* - (UN)
25 March: *Palm Sunday* - (Western Christian)
25 March: *Feast of the Annunciation* - (Catholic Christian)
30 March: *Good Friday* - (Western Christian)
01 April: *Easter Sunday* - (Western Christian)

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