



MINUTES

MEETING OF KNOX INTER-FAITH NETWORK

Held Monday 2 October 2006 at Knox Civic Centre

PRESENT:

Representatives of Faith Communities Present:

Islamic Society of Melbourne, Eastern Region (ISOMER)
 Temple Society, Bayswater
 Sikh Faith
 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
 St Simons Rowville, Catholic Church
 Uniting Church, Ferntree Gully
 Our Lady of Lourdes Bayswater, Catholic Church

Guests:

Presenting on the role of women in Islam

APOLOGIES:

Cr David Cooper
 Cr Monique Davey
 Lisette Pine

Knox Council, Scott Ward and Mayor
 Knox Council, Chandler Ward
 Knox Council, Access and Inclusion Officer
 ISOMER
 Knox Presbyterian Church, Wantirna

OPENING and APOLOGIES:

The meeting was opened at 7:30pm by Riad who welcomed everyone.

AGENDA:

The agenda was accepted as proposed.

3. Presentation and Qs&As – Role of women in faith communities

A) Toltu presented a perspective from the Muslim community, with two major themes.

1) *Reasons behind misconceptions:*

There are cultural perspectives – different cultures apply different practices, and this blends with a perspective of what is derived from purely religious practices. Some of these practices pre-date the origins of Islam. In some countries the political processes impose upon religious practices. There are also issues in some countries with a lack of practice of the true faith.

2) *Islam's teachings on the perspective.*

The purpose of people being created is to worship God and benefit humanity. The teaching is that men's and women's spiritual roles are equal and complementary, and practices are in common. (e.g., reference Qur'an 33:35) Toltu chooses to wear the headscarf as a sign that she is chosen by and worships God. She also noted that the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) stated that, "The acquisition of knowledge is compulsory for every male and female."

B) Brett presented a perspective from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Originating in the Garden of Eden, men and women are meant to work together, side-by-side. One major role of women was enshrined early in the Church's history with the formation in 1842 of The Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, which had a particular focus on ministering to the poor and needy, while also delivering a moral leadership. Women retain a strong leadership role in the pastoral ministries to delivery services. Their role as mothers is revered, as is the case in Islam. Women are entitled to receive the same blessings as men, although the formal administration of the Church is granted to the priesthood, being men. The Church makes considerable effort to support women understanding their blessed role, and in growing into their role. Utah was also the first state in the USA that granted women the right to vote. Brett also read from the blessings and prayers used commonly by young women and women in the Church. Similar attempts are made to motivate young men, but these seem not to be as successful.

C) Tina presented a perspective from the Uniting Church. The Uniting Church is not gender-specific regarding women and men – all are called equally, but gifted differently. (As an example, the most recent head of the Uniting Church synod was female, and the new head is male.) Jesus called us to love one another, using the gifts provided to them. These gifts correspond to a need in the community – both the faith community and broader community. In using these gifts in faith to provide service, each person is worshipping God and fulfilling their mission. Some people in the Uniting Church see God as male, others see God as female and yet others attach no gender.

D) Harpal presented a Sikh perspective. When the Sikh faith started in the 15th Century, women were not treated equally with men, and the caste system was in existence. The first Guru pointed out that women were to be revered and respected. The Guru reprimands people who see women as inferior to men. These thoughts are carried through into the holy book (11th Guru). Women are not excluded from any task and are able to lead prayer. Women can be appointed as missionaries. Sikhism stresses the importance of family. Sikhism condemned women burning themselves on the funeral pyre of their husband. Both men and women are expected to cover their heads. While the holy book directs people to treat women equally, the same issues as in Islam (culture, politics) can distort this message.

E) Gwenda noted the major contribution of the nuns in the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church reserves formal administration and decision-making of the Church to men, but the nuns perform a wide variety of roles – contemplation, nursing, teaching, missionary, etc.. Women often perform the role of pastoral associates in parishes, assisting the priest.

F) (Addition after the meeting by the Secretary, as Rowland, who registered an apology, sent the following information in an email which I did not see until after the meeting.)

As regards Presbyterians and women, Presbyterians hold that men and women are equally made in God's image, and have equal access to salvation. This equality exists with diversity of function in the church. Generally Presbyterians in Australia hesitate to regard Scripture as allowing the exercise of ruling authority in the church. The passages in the New Testament referring to this appear to use arguments based not in cultural considerations but the order of things as designed by God.

Accordingly, while mainstream Presbyterians in this country allowed the ordination of women to the ministry and to eldership in the 1960s (before church union forming the Uniting Church in 1977), this has been retracted from subsequently by the minority of Presbyterians who did not join the Uniting Church, so that women are not ordained to the ministry anymore. Most states do not ordain women to the eldership any longer. Women however do serve significantly in the local churches and on the mission field whether as teachers, nurses or helpers.

The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia has never ordained women. I note, however, with some pleasure, that the founder in Victoria, Rev James Forbes, in 1846 laid it down that women members would have the vote in electing office-bearers. Previously it was fairly general for the husband as head of the house to have voting privileges in calling ministers etc, but not the women.

(Note: The brief notes above are captured with respect by the Secretary
– any errors or omissions are not intentional and will be gladly corrected on request.)

Printed notes were provided by some of the speakers.

The Network members present thanked all the presenters by acclamation. Members present remarked that many of the philosophical practices are similar, but the cultural practices and some religious practices differ.

5. Previous Minutes and Business Arising

RESOLUTION: The minutes as presented were accepted unanimously.

1. Contacting Channel 31
No success yet in contacting Judy –
ACTION: Peter and Gwenda will continue to try to contact Judy.
2. Web-site
Confidential information has been removed from all minutes on the site.
Peter also reminded Network Members that all faith communities can have contact information put on the site if they wish – simply contact Peter at secretary.kin@knoxinterfaith.org.au
3. Funding Application to Knox Council
This has been submitted and Peter noted that a request for further information has been answered by Rowland.
4. Knox Council Interactions
Mayor David Cooper was an apology to the meeting, and so the topic of an end of year multi-cultural celebration was deferred.
ACTION: Riad will follow up with Mayor Cooper on this.
Rolf, Harpal and Gwenda attended the Vision for Knox Community session(s) and reported on the level of energy and ideas presented.
5. Event Reports
Abraham Conference: Gwenda reported on a successful conference and that it was uplifting to attend an event where all people are interested in inter-faith dialogue.
Parliament of World's Religions Proposal Review: Harpal, Gwenda and Rolf reported that in 2009 there will be a parliament of world's religions, as is run every 4 years. Three cities are bidding – Delhi, Singapore and Melbourne. The Melbourne bid is being supported by the Victorian and Australian governments. The meeting at Australian Catholic University was attended by about 200 people. Anywhere from 6,000-10,000 people would be expected to attend. Most activities would be in Melbourne, although there are some possibilities of a few regional events. The decision is expected in December 2006.
6. Treasurer's Report
The statement as at 31 August 2006 showed a balance of \$XXX in the Network account. Peter presented an expense claim of \$XXX, for 27 months of hosting for the Network web-site as advised previously to the Network Executive (instead of \$XXX for renewing the hosting for 12 months). Rolf reimbursed Peter by cheque.

6. Future Items of Interest

1. ICACC Community Forum, 5 October, 10am-2pm, Knox Civic Centre (Inter-Council Aboriginal Consultative Committee) – Riad is attending.
2. 2007 Conference, 2-5 July 2007, Pallotti College, Millgrove (near Warburton) (Jewish Christian Muslim Association of Australia) – Riad recommended to all.
3. Christianity & Islam – Debating: The Word of God – Truth and its consequences for humanity today; 8pm, Saturday 14 October, Agora Theatre, La Trobe University.
For further details contact Nathan (nr2clarge@students.latrobe.edu.au) or Jasmina (jasmine.kid@gmail.com)

4. Toltu alerted Network Members about the return of *Salam Café* on Channel 31 (Monday night, 8:30pm) and encouraged Network Members to view it.
5. Brett raised the Knox Festival in March 2007, and suggested the Network consider having a stall, particularly if the application to Knox Council for funding of the brochures is granted. Network Members supported the Knox Inter-faith Network being represented at the Festival. Riad suggested that a team prepare a plan of action for presentation at the next meeting. **(ACTION:** Brett and Tina volunteered to prepare a proposal for the next meeting.)

7. Any matter of Common Interest.

1. A brief discussion was held on the speech by Pope Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg on 12 September 2006 (reference: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html) and responses from the Muslim world. Peter commended the article by Waleed Aly, a director of the Islamic Council of Victoria (*Subtle scholar, but what an inept politician, The Age, 18 September 2006*, reference: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/opinion/subtle-scholar-but-what-an-inept-politician/2006/09/17/1158431582819.html>) as a balanced analysis of the situation. He also read the following paragraph by the British historian Steven Runciman, which Network Members present asked to be included in the minutes and also proposed be sent in a letter to local and metropolitan papers, under signature of the Knox Inter-faith Network Secretary.

The triumphs of the Crusade were the triumphs of faith. But faith without wisdom is a dangerous thing. By the inexorable laws of history the whole world pays for the crimes and follies of each of its citizens. In the long sequence of interaction and fusion between Orient and Occident out of which our civilisation has grown, the Crusades were a tragic and destructive episode. The historian as he gazes back across the centuries at their gallant story must find his admiration overcast by sorrow at the witness that it bears to the limitations of human nature. There was so much courage and so little honour, so much devotion and so little understanding. High ideals were besmirched by cruelty and greed, enterprise and endurance by a blind and narrow self-righteousness; and the Holy War itself was nothing more than a long act of intolerance in the name of God, which is the sin against the Holy Ghost [Holy Spirit]

S. Runciman, *A History of the Crusades, Volume III: The Kingdom of Acre and the later Crusades*; The Folio Society: London, 2003; page 401
(Book first published by the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1954)

8. Next visits and meetings

1. 4 December 2006 – AGM – There will be no formal presentation. Apart from electing 2007 office-bearers, the focus will be on confirming the 2007 meeting plans (with topics and dates for each meeting) and our participation in the Knox Festival. **(ACTION:** All Network Members are asked to reflect on whether the Network is working the way that is intended and according to the Constitution, and be prepared to comment on current perceptions and future plans.
2. Visitations: Possible Eid celebration, Sunday 29 October. **(ACTION:** Riad to advise details by email to Peter, who will distribute to Members.

The meeting ended at 9:20 p.m.