

Constructing a Local
Multifaith
Network

A Partnership under the Australian Government's *Living In Harmony* initiative

Prepared by Desmond Cahill and Michael Leahy

communication
DIALOGUE
NETWORKING NETWORKING NETWORKING NETWORKING NETWORKING NETWORKING
NETWORKING NETWORKING NETWORKING NETWORKING NETWORKING NETWORKING
WORKING NETWORKING NETWORKING NETWORKING NETWORKING NETWORKING
UNDERSTANDING

(c) Copyright Commonwealth of Australia 2004

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the Commonwealth available from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.

Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to the Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Intellectual Property Branch, Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, GPO Box 2154, Canberra ACT 2601 or at <http://www.dcita.gov.au>

Design and layout Done...ByFriday

Printed by National Capital Printing

ISBN: 0-9756064-2-5

CONTENTS

Message from the Minister	5
<i>Introduction</i>	7
Why construct a Local Interfaith Network?	9
<i>Section One</i>	13
Constructing a Local Interfaith Network	15
<i>Section Two</i>	29
An Annotated List of Australian Interfaith Organisations and Resource Websites	31
<i>Section Three</i>	37
An Annotated List of International Interfaith Organisations	39

FROM THE MINISTER



Message from The Hon Peter McGauran MP, Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs

Australia's multifaith society reflects the religious beliefs of our diverse population. As a society, we need to promote understanding and respect for everyone, and to bind and strengthen our communities.

Australia is one of the world's most successful multicultural societies, embracing people from all religions, cultures and backgrounds. Australians continue to maintain a peaceful society, striving to ensure that every Australian has a sense of belonging and opportunity. Building effective relationships within and between people is an important contribution to social harmony, helping to focus all those involved to identify emerging issues and address common questions.

All Australians are in a good position to effect meaningful, positive change at the local community level. By reinforcing the basic principles of respect and understanding for all, and by dispelling misconceptions about other cultures and religions, we can all work towards common goals.

This kit has been created through the Australian Government's Living in Harmony initiative, which supports local communities to find local solutions in order to further a harmonious multicultural and multifaith society, and has been designed to help you to promote dialogue in your local community.

I wish you every success.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter McGauran". The signature is fluid and cursive.

The Hon Peter McGauran MP

ABOUT THIS KIT

This information kit has been designed for religiously committed and civic-minded people to start a multifaith network in their local area. It consists of four sections:

1. An introduction outlining why, in changed times, it is now necessary to build multifaith networks across Australia.
2. A “How-to-do-it” section with suggested activities for local multifaith networks.
3. An annotated list of Australian interfaith organisations and useful resource websites.
4. An annotated list of key international interfaith organisations with other useful resource organisations and websites.

We hope that this kit will fulfil its overall purpose in building a harmonious multicultural and interfaith society. We thank all those people whose ideas and initiatives have contributed to this kit. They are too many to acknowledge but they recognise the importance of the interfaith agenda in a changing Australia. They are all volunteers who, in their own faith commitment, recognise that, at the core of all authentic faith traditions, is the recognition, affirmation and welcoming of the other, the stranger, the alien, the foreigner, so that they remain no longer the stranger, the alien, the foreigner.

Prepared by:

Desmond Cahill RMIT University and Michael Leahy Deakin University

*Why
construct **A**
Local Interfaith
Network?*

WHY CONSTRUCT A LOCAL INTERFAITH NETWORK?

The responsibility of civic and religious leaders.

Desmond Cahill RMIT University, Michael Leahy Deakin University

This information kit has been prepared to assist religiously committed and civic-minded people to construct an interfaith network in their local area. As the Roman Catholic theologian, Hans Kung, in his longstanding commitment to interreligious understanding and to the articulation of a global ethic, has insisted, “there can be no peace unless there is peace between the religions”. The ecumenical rapprochement during the 1960s and 1970s that brought together the mainstream Christian churches played a helpful role in creating a climate that led to the careful construction of a multicultural society of which we, as Australians, can be justifiably proud. But together interfaith understanding, interaction and cooperation will not happen automatically. Now is the historical moment to take a further step by addressing these issues. In contrast to inter-Christian ecumenical relationships, interfaith issues have never been at the forefront of Australian public life. This has been so even though they are central to the construction of social harmony and to the social policy of multiculturalism espoused by both sides of the political fence. Whatever our personal, ethnic and religious background, in Australia we all have to live under the same tent. The terrorist attacks of New York and Bali and the myriad of other troubling events since the turn of the Millennium have highlighted the increased pressures bearing down upon us who live on this vast and ancient island continent where Aboriginal spiritualities have been practised for thousands of years.

But even without New York and Bali, Australia would still have been required to address the interfaith issue if in less dramatic circumstances. Australia’s religious profile is changing – the percentage in the 2001 census who claimed to have no religion has plateaued while the Buddhist population between 1996 and 2001 almost doubled. Both the Hindu and Muslim populations jumped by just over 40 per cent in the same intercensal period. Australia is becoming more, not less, religious, but religious in a different way. The last two decades has seen Australia become, albeit paradoxically, both a more secular and a more multifaith society.

Religion and Relationships

Swami Agnivesh of the Bonded Labour Liberation Front in New Delhi and a noted interfaith activist has articulated his Spiritual Vision for the Dialogue of Religions. He suggests that authentic religion is about relationships. “Every religion tries to enable the human person to relate to the divine and to the rest of creation in a harmonious and mutually enriching fashion. It is from this perspective that the importance of the relationship between religions needs to be appreciated. An alienation between religions, or a relationship of mutual hostility, even apathy, implies a contradiction of the very idea of religion. Physicians need to heal themselves first. We need to work earnestly towards bringing about a wholesome relationship of constructive cooperation among religions”¹.

¹ Swami Agnivesh (2003) ‘A case for pro-active spirituality: a spiritual vision for the dialogue of religions’, circulated on 24th October on the e-Praxis Inter-religious E-mail Conference edited by Rev. Gary Leonard and available through teologie@hotmail.com

Now that religion is at world centre stage, the interfaith challenge has become a necessity.

Generating understanding, interaction and cooperation between the various faith communities, large and small, local and global, is no longer an option. Now that religion is at world centre stage, the interfaith challenge has become a necessity. And the answers to the world's current political and religious problems partly lie not in a secularism that often triggers a religious extremism, but in religious moderation and in ecumenical and interfaith activity.

As a result of the increasing cultural and religious diversity emerging in many parts of the world, the changing role of the nation state in a globalizing world and, thirdly, the recent outbreaks of terrorist attacks, the interrelationship between the nation-state and faith communities is evolving. And faith communities, working in tandem with government authorities, have an important role to play in creating a civil society. They have a role in

creating a nation's social capital which is concerned with the construction of solid, uncorrupted but flexible institutions and the facilitation of positive communicative processes between the groups that compose any society, all built upon authentic values, moral norms and ethical behaviours, whether within personal relationships, corporate behaviour or in the art of statecraft.

One of the major features of twentieth century history was the enduring stability of religion and its institutions - 86 per cent of the world's population belong to a religious faith (2 billion are Christian, 1.2 are Muslim and .8 billion are Hindu) and in Australia, the comparable figure is about 75 per cent.

We now live in a world where it is less possible to speak of "Christendom" or "the Islamic world" or "the Hindu world" or "the Buddhist Confucian world". Religious diasporas continue to be extended across the world.

Positive Community Outcomes after the Terrorist Attacks

While there were some negative responses to the events in New York, Washington and Bali, equally importantly and much more positively, there has been a constructive engagement between Muslim and other faith communities. Across Australia, many multifaith initiatives have occurred and this has created a new awareness and understanding.

In Australia, faith traditions with their focus on the ultimate and the absolute as well as the local and the universal have been key elements in the formation of Australia's pluralist society. Religious groupings have been formative of core social and moral Australian values and of public service, welfare and philanthropic traditions. With their localised presence, their community ethic and their universalist outlook, most religious groups have made positive contributions to the construction of Australia's multicultural society that has been recognised world-wide as a model and exemplar.

Faith communities have played a major role in helping to assist in the settlement of immigrants and making them feel welcome, in changing the attitudes of Australians in welcoming the stranger to our midst, in holding Migration Sundays and various festivals and conferences, in pressing governments to implement policies and programs through bodies such as the Ecumenical Migration Centre and the Australian Catholic Migration Office, in creating a sense of belonging for immigrants and meeting their spiritual needs often in their first language and, lastly, in defusing ancient hatreds brought to Australia by immigrants and refugees as part of their historical baggage.

The second major positive consequence after the terrorist attacks is that we are seeing the development of local multifaith networks led by the World Conference of Religions for Peace. FECCA (Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia) has established APERO (Australian Partnership of Ethnic and Religious Organizations) in association with the Council for Multicultural Australia. There has been established a joint Christian-Jewish-Muslim dialogue; in Melbourne a joint Catholic-Muslim dialogue group has been established, and LaTrobe University initiated a series of dialogues between Christians and Muslims. Griffith University has

established its multifaith centre. These are very good moves, but more needs to be done at local level.

Basic Questions for Government and Religious Leaders

The basic questions for the government and religious leaders at state and national levels are these:

- » How do we, as leaders in a civil society, create a harmonious multifaith community, especially when that harmony may be challenged by overseas, and perhaps Australian, events of great provocation?
- » How do we insulate and inoculate ourselves against religious extremism, and support religious moderation?

At the local level, religious leaders are themselves also under much greater scrutiny and accountability, and they must reflect upon a similar set of questions:

- » How does my faith community contribute to creating a harmonious multifaith community?
- » In my faith tradition and its long history, what is its attitude to other world faiths and their peoples?

- » How well do members of my faith community understand the beliefs of other faiths?
- » Is there anything in my theological tradition that militates against interfaith interaction and cooperation?
- » Is there any aspect of my religious output that encourages anti-‘infidel’ attitudes or attitudes such as “other religions are the work of Satan”?

Faith communities can have four types of arrangements or interrelationships: those of (1) conflict (2) segregation (3) competition or (4) cooperation though in reality these relationships are a mixture of the types.

Relationship of Cooperation

As has already been mentioned peace between the religions is very important. There cannot be harmony in Australia's local government areas unless there is harmony between its faith communities working together in dialogue and some common activity.

Interfaith cooperation, firstly, means the different faith communities not just living harmoniously side-by-side (though this is a good beginning), but actively knowing about and respecting each other and each other's beliefs in fair and honourable competition, not allowing the mistakes and tragedies of the distant and recent past to pervert the present. Secondly, it means the diverse faith communities working together in projects that bring mutual and rich benefits to the local and wider community in the spirit of unity-in-diversity. And thirdly, it means that the whole community becomes a lighthouse of interfaith cooperation not just to Australia but to the whole world which badly needs this example. Interfaith collaboration is not a luxury, it is a requirement, difficult though it might be to achieve. We benefit personally as our faith is challenged by other faiths, and our own faith is enriched by meeting faith-filled people from other traditions; the whole community benefits from this collaboration as strangers become friends.

It cannot be denied that many faiths explicitly claim or manifest an inner tendency to claim to be the true religion or the true revelation or the true way of liberation or exaltation. Perhaps it can be said that all religions are approximations of the truth or of ultimate reality. It would be a perversion of all authentic religion which has an all-embracing universalism if such beliefs, often based on a literalist interpretation of the sacred texts, were to descend into religious extremism. What is needed are persons who, committed to their faith which they will perceive as the best explanation of life's ultimate questions, make internal to themselves their commitment to persons of other faiths in constructing Australia as a multifaith corroboree.

This interfaith kit is designed to help pursue the creation and maintenance of relationships of engagement and cooperation between faiths in Australia. The kit is composed of several sections:

1. A "How to Do It" section on constructing an interfaith network in a local government or similar setting.
2. A list of Australian organisations and agencies, together with other resources, that might be helpful to civic and religious leaders who have committed themselves to the multifaith agenda.
3. A list of international organisations and website-sourced material that may be helpful in informing people about the technicalities of world faiths and interfaith activity.

These listings illustrate that across the world there are countless people committed to the interfaith agenda. The construction of a local interfaith network requires commitment, determination and an appreciation of the other. As Martin Buber, the great Jewish thinker, once said, "In a genuine dialogue each of the partners, even when one stands in opposition to the other, heeds, affirms, and confirms his opponent as an existing other".

*Constructing
a Local Interfaith
Network*

CONSTRUCTING A LOCAL INTERFAITH NETWORK

This “how-to-do-it” strategy for constructing a local multifaith network is based on information gathered by the World Conference of Religions for Peace in its activities and research carried out during the research project on Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia, conducted by the Australian Multicultural Foundation in association with WCRP and RMIT and Monash Universities. It consists of four parts:

1. Basic attitudes for interfaith interaction
2. Steps in constructing an interfaith network
3. Sixteen suggested activities
4. Stories of two local interfaith networks

1. Basic Attitudes for Interfaith Interaction

According to one Jewish religious leader, “interfaith activity is a hard slog”. Single-group dominance or personality clashes can wreck interfaith collaboration. Past historical legacies and deep emotions are involved, and can be potentially destructive. According to the UK’s Interfaith Network² as part of its Code of Conduct in fostering interfaith relationships, as well as exercising good will, we need:

- » To respect the freedom of those of each faith and no faith within the law to express their personal beliefs and convictions.
 - » To learn to understand what persons of each faith and no faith actually believe and value, allowing them to express this in their own terms.
 - » To respect the convictions of others about food, dress and social etiquette and not behave in ways which cause needless offence.
 - » To recognise that all of us at times fall short of the ideals of our faith traditions and never to compare our own ideals with other people’s practices.
 - » To work to prevent disagreement from leading to conflict and always seeking to avoid violence, verbal or physical, in our relationships.
- There will be faith communities that do not wish to take part in multifaith activities or certain types of activities. The wish of some faith communities to be left alone or their attitude to disagree with interfaith activists needs to be respected though this is not to say that such attitudes should not be quietly and firmly challenged.
- When we are speaking about faith matters with each other, the UK Interfaith Network recommends that we do so with sensitivity, honesty and straightforwardness. This implies:
- » To recognise that listening attentively as well as speaking honestly is necessary for a genuine conversation.
 - » To be honest and courageous in expressing our beliefs and religious allegiances.
 - » To be careful in not misrepresenting or disparaging other’s beliefs and practices, no matter how difficult we might find in accepting them.
 - » To correct misunderstandings or misrepresentations not only of our own faith but also of other faiths whenever we come across them.

² Interfaith Network for the UK ‘Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs’, <http://www.btinternet.com/~ifnet.uk/code.htm>, downloaded on 4th May 2003.

- » To be straightforward about our intentions and to accept that in formal interfaith meetings there is a particular responsibility to ensure that the religious commitment of all those present will be respected.

Missionising or proselytising should never be a principal motivation for entering into interfaith activity. In a multifaith society, missionising should be characterised by restraint and sensitivity for the other's dignity and freedom to choose. In a democratic society such as Australia, knocking on people's doors or speaking publicly in the street to proclaim one's faith is part of religious freedom.

2. Steps in Constructing an Interfaith Network

There are many recipes in constructing a local interfaith network. Our general recipe is as follows:

- a. Formation of a small working party.
- b. Needs analysis and information collection.
- c. Approaching local faith communities and their leaders.
- d. Initial meetings and constructing an agenda.

a. Formation of a Small Working Party:

An interfaith network can be started on the initiative of just one person or a small group. Sometimes, the initiative has come from a local councillor or from the mainstream Christian churches or from an enthused individual who identifies a need. From this, it is suggested that a small working party be formed – at this early stage, it does not have to be representative but it should be as inclusive as possible with sensitivity to establishing the credibility of the working party.

Throughout the process, maintaining credibility will always be an important task. Whilst many interfaith groups are established in reactive circumstances such as September 11, the emphasis should be on the proactive.

As far as it is possible, obtain the support and preferably the participation of the local councillors and/or parliamentarians. Select a chairperson who may or may not be the longterm chair and who has the capacity to liaise successfully with local government authorities and across the different faith communities.

b. Needs Analysis and Information Collection:

As part of its initial work, it is suggested that the working party conduct a brainstorming session of itself so as to do a needs analysis. This will feed into articulating a vision for the network with such questions as:

Is there a need for a local interfaith network?

What are the inter-religious needs for the local, national and global levels?

How could a local interfaith network help to meet local needs?

What are we trying to achieve? Why? And how?

As well as a needs analysis, the working party needs to collect as much information as is necessary. In particular, it needs to collect information regarding:

- » The religious profile of the defined area.
- » The places of worship in the defined area.
- » List of key faith community leaders.

The Religious Profile of the Local Area:

It is important to establish the religious profile of the area, including how it is changing. The best source is the most recent census conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The local government authorities will almost certainly have information from the ABS. The ABS home site is: <http://www.abs.gov.au>

You can begin here if you wish to obtain a general idea of what is available on this site. The site below gives a snapshot of some of the data from the 2001 Census of Population and Housing under the following headings:

Census Counts	Occupation
People of Indigenous Origin	Industry of Employment
Age	Individual Income
Birthplace	Method of Travel to Work
Ancestry	Families and Households
Language Spoken at Home	Dwellings
Computers and the Internet	Table 1 Selected Characteristics
Registered Marital Status	Table 2 Census Counts
Non-School Qualification: Level of Education	Table 3 Age by Sex
Labour Force Status	Table 4 Selected Averages

However, for information about religious affiliation from the same Census, you may need to download the Religious Affiliation package for a small fee from this site.

Another useful source for ABS data is that held on the website of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia at www.fecca.org.au

From these sources you should be able to find out which religious groups are represented in your municipality. It is strongly suggested that you write up this profile, identifying both the mainstream and the small minority faith communities and outlining any special features that might distinguish the profile from those of other local government areas or from the overall Australian profile.

*The Places of Worship
in the Local Area:*

The local government authorities will probably have some contact details for these for bona fide community purposes, although privacy restrictions may apply to such information's release. The local telephone directory should give the numbers for places of worship within your municipality. However, probably the most accessible information source, certainly for the capital cities, are the most up-to-date street directories which include a list of Places of Worship with the map references.

Connected to this is the issue of membership for the interfaith network. Here there are no hard and fixed rules. Some networks define membership on the basis of groups with places of worship in the local government geographical boundaries, and perhaps with observer status for those faith groups without their own place of worship in the local area. This is an issue for small faith communities whose places of worship are spread far apart.

*List of key local faith
community leaders:*

The drawing up of any up-to-date list of local faith community leaders may not be easy, given the other surprisingly large numbers of faith communities in any local government area, especially in metropolitan areas. Some local governments are committed to keeping such lists up-to-date though privacy considerations in some States may constitute a barrier. Faith leaders often change over a 3 – 5 year period. It may not be absolutely necessary to obtain an up-to-date list, but it is preferable and more personal.

*The local
telephone
directory
should give
the numbers
for places
of worship
within your
municipality.*

c. Approaching Local Faith Communities and their Leaders:

The critical moment in establishing a network is garnering the support of the local faith communities. Not all communities will participate though it will be important into the future to keep them informed of the progress and activities. After drawing up lists of the local faith communities, their places of worship and the names of the local faith leaders, a letter of invitation should be sent for an inaugural meeting with a view to establishing the local interfaith network. This process should not be rushed.

The letter, in reflecting an essentially open process, should outline several key reasons for the formation of a network, the work already completed by the steering committee, the support already gained from local government authorities and other key community figures, its congruence with the Australian government's Living-in-Harmony program and the desire to initiate a process and articulate a vision with a practical agenda that builds understanding and cooperation in multicultural Australia. There will always be some reluctance – the whole interfaith agenda has to be demystified, and assurances given that it is not an exercise in proselytism.

An issue with some religious leaders will be spoken English proficiency, and it may be desirable for the community to be represented by a person fully proficient in English. However, at meetings, chairpersons and other participants will need to be sensitive to the dynamics of cross-cultural communication in that there are differences in the way persons from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds impart information and respond to questions, in the way they handle the difficult paralinguistic of English and in the differences in body language that can result in miscommunication.

It is preferable to contact the leaders and meet them on a face-to-face basis. If there is a local Christian Ministers' Fraternal, this may be a useful starting point, and their cooperation would be vital. A generous lead time should be given in approaching the first meeting or gathering.

d. Initial Meetings and Constructing an Agenda:

The first and subsequent initial meetings should be the opportunity to generate trust and confidence within the group. Detailed attention needs to be given to the dietary requirements of participants if there are to be refreshments. Momentum needs to be created across the community, and the press can play a useful role. Contact with local press personnel is to be encouraged, briefing them on the aims of the initiative.

During the initial meetings, input on basic attitudes for successful interfaith interaction and the experience of nearby interfaith networks will be useful. Explanations about each local faith community and its spiritual, and perhaps community work, will generate understanding.

Gradually but surely, the newly-formed network ought to move to articulate a common vision that addresses the local context, which might coalesce around some common statement, and some initial activities, including an official launch of the network. The process should not be rushed, as some faith leaders may need time to convince their community of the worthwhile nature of the network, most particularly if the community carries with it some substantial historical baggage associated with a fellow faith participant.

3. Sixteen Suggested Activities

The following list shows the diverse activities pursued by different interfaith networks. They have been done by at least one network or group in Australia.

Interfaith Theological and Community Dialogue Sessions:

These are meetings or series of meetings where faith-committed persons come together to explain their own faith commitment to each other and/or to reflect upon a common theological or ethical theme from different faith perspectives. Such an activity requires participants or leaders who have specialist knowledge about their own faith and its history. The La Trobe Dialogue series bringing together Christians and Muslims is an example as is a full-day seminar led by the mayor held by the City of Darebin in September 2003.

Interfaith Women's Group:

Interfaith movements around the world inevitably trigger the emergence of women's groups in order for women to meet as women and to balance the male bias of interfaith encounters. They are driven by a desire to share the faiths they treasure and wish to share. Their activities include faith-sharing, discussions of theological texts and visiting different places of worship. In Australia, an example is the Sydney Women's Interfaith Network (WIN) formed in 1999 and now officially registered with the Women's Organisations of the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

Interfaith Youth Group:

These groups are formed by religiously committed young people who commit themselves to the interfaith agenda. They are formed either by young people from one religious tradition or from a range of such traditions. In Australia, examples of the former are the Sydney-based Affinity group or the Melbourne-based Australian Intercultural Society, formed around young Turkish Muslims whose philosophy is inspired by the Muslim thinker Fethullah Gulen.

Multifaith Blessing Ceremonies:

Blessing prayers are proclaimed by the major local faith communities at some inauguration of an event or the opening of a public site. In Melbourne, a multifaith blessing ceremony was included in the official opening of Federation Square on the banks of the Yarra. Some blessing ceremonies are now occurring at the opening of the local council year or the installation of a mayor. An example is the City of Hume in Melbourne's north-western suburbs. Multifaith blessing ceremonies can also be used at times of national celebration such as happened at the opening of Parliament House in 1988.

Rostered Prayers for Council Meetings:

In this activity, local faith leaders are placed on a roster to lead the councillors in prayerful reflection at the beginning of each council meeting. The Cities of Dandenong, Moreland and Hume have pioneered this practice which recognises the multifaith nature of the local population.

Prayer Services for Peace:

This is where local interfaith groups gather together to pray for world peace. Usually they link in with peace groups or with local councils or are associated with the World Day of Peace. Useful websites for such occasions are those of the World Peace Prayer Society (www.worldpeace.org) and of World Prayers (www.worldprayers.org). The major examples were the various ceremonies held after the September 11, 2001, and October 12, 2002, tragedies.

Fasting Day:

Fasting is a core practice in many faith traditions, perhaps in preparation for major religious festivals, perhaps as a reminder of the gift of food from God, perhaps as a reparation for sinfulness, perhaps as a reminder of the poor and the starving. A fast day is nominated, usually in relation to a particular cause.

Multifaith Bus or Car Tours:

Several times a year, the interfaith network organises guided tours of a range of places of worship in the local area. The aim is to inform participants about the places of worship, whether a Uniting church or an Orthodox church or a mosque or a temple or a synagogue. Participants pay for the cost of the bus, or else people move in car convoys. The Dandenong network has pioneered this educational and community activity. It can be extended to schools as part of a religious studies or a social studies program.

Video/CD Production:

Two Australian municipalities (Fairfield in Sydney, Darebin in Melbourne) have produced videos or a CD, either visually documenting the faith communities and the local places of worship (Fairfield) or reflecting the views of young filmmakers on faith and religion from a multicultural perspective (Darebin). They have worked in tandem with municipal officials and steering committees.

Open Days of Places of Worship:

A variant on the multifaith bus tour is to coordinate an open day of selected places of worship in a local area. Such a day needs to be very well advertised through the local press, and guided tours are given in each place of worship at set times such as 10.30 a.m., 12.00 p.m., 1.30 p.m. and 3.00 p.m.. The guided tours must be given by persons knowledgeable about the place of worship, its architecture, its symbols and its religious artefacts and knowledgeable about the faith, able to respond to technical questions about the faith.

Multifaith Artistic Projects:

There has always been an established tradition of religious art in Australia. Projects could be a competition for art works on a multifaith theme for adults or a similar competition for school students. A variant, more to do with the literary than the visual arts, is a postcard competition in which school children complete a sentence which might begin, "Interfaith activity means....." or "Peace between the religions results from.....".

Multifaith Concerts:

The South Australian Multifaith Association has sponsored concerts with artists drawn from many cultural and musical traditions as a way of conveying the interfaith message. It can also be a useful fundraiser. In Melbourne, the Turkish Cypriot and the Greek Cypriot communities have presented folk concerts to bring about rapprochement between the two groups, each singing in the other's language.

Multifaith Sacred Spaces:

A growing and very important issue is the provision of a sacred space in public institutions to carry out religious ceremonies. It must be a space that is reserved for prayer and sacred rites. The Dandenong Network was instrumental in transforming the chapel in the local hospital into a sacred space, decorated by a religious artist, that can be adapted and used by the different faith traditions. International sporting festivals such as the Olympic Games and the Commonwealth Games must provide such a space for the athletes and their chaplains.

Information Kit:

A local multifaith information kit, "Many Faiths, One People" was produced for 2003 by the Network of Faith Communities in the City of Dandenong, and it is a very useful exemplar. It consists of a well-produced booklet with an introduction (including a brief history of the network begun in 1989) with the common statement (see below), and brief explanations of the Aboriginal worldview, the major faiths of Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism and of the two spiritual organisations, the Brahma Kumaris and Sathya Sai. There are accompanying leaflets, outlining the common statement, what the network is and is not, a list of the religious festivals and the structure of the network. Details are available on the website www.greaterdandenong.com

Preparation of a Common Statement:

Another worthwhile activity is the articulation of a common statement for public distribution – its purpose can be related to the local context. The Dandenong network has agreed on the following:

Common Statement of Faith Communities

We bring greetings from the faith communities to the Mayor, Councillors, and people of Greater Dandenong

We offer to the City of Greater Dandenong our common commitment to live together in peace and goodwill

We affirm our desire to promote respect and tolerance for the integrity of each other's beliefs, cultures and traditions. This desire arises not only from our common humanity but also from our being people of faith and people of prayer.

We recognise that as neighbours, we have responsibilities to the world and ourselves. We therefore urge all citizens, both religious and non-religious, to put aside intolerance, prejudice and divisiveness, to attain peaceful and fruitful co-existence in our City.

Social Justice Breakfast Meetings:

The interfaith network in the City of Kingston meets four times a year for a breakfast in a restaurant, and a visiting speaker gives an address, usually on some current social justice issue. A variant on this is the sponsoring of social justice seminars, including a local issue which may lead to advocacy and lobbying efforts.

4. Stories of Two Local Interfaith Networks: Moreland & Dandenong

There are many interfaith groups or networks around Australia, especially in Melbourne. To give some guidance to committed people forming new networks, we have researched two networks to share their story. The Dandenong Network is the longest established in Australia. Both the Dandenong and Moreland networks are serving very multicultural and multifaith areas, and provide different models in interacting with Council and their range of activities.

Moreland Interfaith Gathering

The Moreland Interfaith Gathering is a committee of the Moreland City Council though it was formed neither by the Council nor is it governed by the Council. Rather the group was formed after the leaders of several faith communities in the municipality approached the Mayor with a view to establishing some means of communication between the different faith communities. This approach was prompted by the religious leaders' perception of the growing religious diversity in the Moreland area, and the need they felt to engage with newcomers in a meaningful way. Thus, while the initiative to form the Moreland Interfaith Gathering, as it became known, came from the Anglo Christian churches, the formal lead was taken by Council, which convened it and still provides its executive support.

The Gathering has now been in existence since 1996 and its membership includes the following faith communities: Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, Catholic, Anglican, Greek Orthodox and Syro-Malabar Orthodox. Meetings are held every two months for the purposes of sharing ideas and organising community activities. The Councillor responsible for interfaith relations chairs these meetings. The Gathering has shared ideas about parish activities and issues encountered in parish and community life such as youth problems, drugs, unemployment and refugees and has taken appropriate action such as advocating for these issues and/or writing letters. It engages in various activities, notable among which was the organisation of an interfaith ceremony following the attacks on Washington and New York on September 11, 2001. The workload of the Gathering varies according to local and broader community events and issues. According to its Council facilitator, one of the peaks was the period after September 11, 2001, when many of the faith leaders experienced enormous demands on their time to speak to community groups and took leadership roles on issues associated with this tragedy and its impact on the local multicultural community. The regular meetings produce, according to the facilitator, important communication and action initiatives. Such activities include the ceremony of blessing in a number of faith traditions, of the new Mayor and Councillors at the beginning of each Council year. This activity takes place annually. The Moreland Interfaith Gathering has also established the annual Moreland Fast Day, which was launched in 2001 to raise awareness about poverty issues in the community and which is held annually.

Indeed, the Gathering of their leaders has had an impact on the wider local community by drawing the members of the different faith groups closer together, enabling them to communicate with each other and with Council. This communication serves to break down misconceptions about each other in the minds of the leaders, the faith communities themselves and the wider community. Members of the Gathering are now able to take on leadership roles in relation to issues that affect them. The Gathering now has a high profile in the local press, which now seeks out a spokesperson from among them when faith and other social issues impacting on the local community arise in the municipality. The Gathering, for example, needed to play a constructive and positive role in leading the response to the events of September 11, 2001, rather than an analytical and critical one. To this end, it organised an interfaith ceremony to mark the event, and issued a public statement urging mutual respect and understanding between faith groups.

What advice can this group offer to others thinking of forming such a group? The facilitator suggested the following:

- » Be clear about the purpose of the group.
- » Be open to all who wish to participate in it.
- » Foster a sense of ownership of the group by all members.
- » Share the tasks of running the group equally among all rather than leave the lion's share to any particular member.
- » Ensure that invitations to events are extended to all members.
- » Be apolitical in the sense of not bringing the politics of issues to the discussion table.
- » Participate in other public events so as to contribute constructively to the life of the local multicultural and wider community.
- » Take a leadership role and advocate on issues affecting the local community as the need arises.

The Gathering's Newsletters may be viewed on the website of the City of Moreland: www.moreland.vic.gov.au

Interfaith Network of the City of Greater Dandenong

This Network, though supported by Council with a small grant and executive services, is not a formal committee of Council. The Network's President and Chairman are not Councillors but members of the Network. The Council's diversity officer acts, however, as the Network's convenor and as such, is an ex officio member of its executive. The membership of the Network is made up of seven faith groups. The following are among its current or proposed activities:

- » five tours per year of the various places of worship in the municipality for the general public
- » an annual forum attended by the hundreds featuring living-in-harmony activities
- » a schools program
- » one hour information forums open to all Council staff and to the general public
- » special activities on the annual Living-in-Harmony Day.

The network had chosen a 'partnership' relationship with Council rather than be a formal committee of Council, as the Moreland group had done. The basis was that the initiative had to be 'from the community for the community'. Council had provided welcome financial and administrative support, but responsibility for the life of the group needed to rest with its members. This strategy meant that Council would secure the network's contribution to civic affairs by invitation. For example, Council has recently launched a project to create a civic tapestry, and had referred the artist to the network for advice on its composition.

The Greater Dandenong Network has achieved community regard for the various contributions it makes to the life of the City. Prominent among these contributions are its training programs for teachers and Council staff. The program for teachers has been offered for several years, and teachers who complete the program of tours to the local places of worship can count this towards their professional development requirements. Indeed, the dates of these programs are circularised in the local bulletins of the Victorian education ministry. The Network also takes pride in its work with the Dandenong Hospital to develop a multifaith sacred space.

A founding member of the Network provided an account of how the group came to be formed and some of its experiences over the subsequent years. The group started life as 'The Faith Communities of the City of Springvale'. When it was founded in the early 1980s, the City of Springvale had a large immigrant population, including a migrant hostel, and later it played host to a wave of Asian refugees. In this later period, the City experienced a number of problems with youth crime that attracted considerable attention from the press and the media. The Council of the former City of Springvale had already embraced the cultural diversity of its people, and had taken initiatives to ensure equality of access to its services. The youth crime problem, however, presented Council with a further challenge to which it responded by appointing an officer to promote harmony amid its diversity. The Council and this officer took the attitude that the City's situation should not be regarded as a problem but as an opportunity to promote harmony in diversity. This positive approach required symbols of cooperation between community groups and credible leadership in its promotion. This Council officer, knowing that the ministers of the local western Christian churches were already meeting in a local Ministers' Fraternal, approached them for help. The mainstream churches responded positively to this approach but the fundamentalist Pentecostal churches did not. The leaders of the mainstream churches accepted the officer's invitation to accompany her on visits to the faith

First, the leaders take prayers within their own faith communities for Mayor and Councillors. Then the Common Statement of Faith Communities, which was prepared for the first induction ceremony, is read at each such ceremony and presented to the incoming Mayor before the gallery and media with the faith leaders standing.

groups other than Christian - as a result, the original Springvale interfaith network was formed. When the City of Springvale was amalgamated with adjoining municipalities to form the City of Greater Dandenong in 1989, this group faced the challenge of becoming not just a Springvale but also a city-wide group.

The group met this challenge successfully, thanks in no small measure to the work of the founding Chairman of the new body, a Uniting Church Minister, and the City of Greater Dandenong's diversity officer. The new group adopted the title 'Interfaith Network of the City of Greater Dandenong'. It was important for this group to be seen as standing and working together with the Council, so its leaders looked for occasions for achieving this. The first such occasion to present itself was the induction ceremony for the Mayor. At first, red tape impeded participation by a religious organisation in this ceremony but in due course this was overcome. Now the leaders of the Network's faith groups take an official part in the ceremony. First, the leaders take prayers within their own faith communities for Mayor and Councillors. Then the Common Statement of Faith Communities, which was prepared for the first induction ceremony, is read at each such ceremony and presented to the incoming Mayor before the gallery and media with the faith leaders standing. This Common Statement was favoured over a formal constitution and documents of incorporation owing to difficulties perceived with the latter.

However, the idea of the Network is not merely that the leaders, but also the communities of the various faith groups should come together. To this end, an Annual Gathering is held at which the Common Statement is signed on behalf of the faith communities, and presented to the Mayor. On that occasion each community engages in some form of religious expression. In speaking of faith communities, this group believes it is important to remember that, while traditions such as the Buddhist or Catholic tradition may be one, there will nonetheless be many different communities of Buddhists and Catholics.

Each of the member faith communities of the Network is now rostered to provide the opening prayer for all Council meetings. The groups provide a prayer from their own traditions but one which respects other faiths. They recite it in whatever language they prefer but provide a summary of it in English. Councillors' attention to the prayer, while not perfect, is not as problematic as that of Members of the State and Federal Parliaments to the Lord's Prayer.

Another public expression of community harmony took the form of two banners created by member faith groups. These banners were made up of fifteen patches, each of the fifteen member faith groups contributing one patch. The first of these was made for presentation to the Mayor at the first induction ceremony. The second was intended to be cut up and a piece given to each faith community as a token of the occasion. However, the banner seemed all too beautiful to cut up, so it was decided that each community should hold the banner for a fortnight and then hand it over to the next community. This required communities to visit one another, which had a symbolism of its own.

When the attacks on New York and Washington took place on September 11, 2001, the Network already had a gathering scheduled for another purpose in the Sacred Space at the Dandenong Hospital. Members used this occasion to express themselves in prayer about these attacks. Acutely conscious of the diversity of their beliefs, the members are careful not to suggest a unity of faith that is not there. On this occasion, therefore, they expressed themselves religiously, 'not in common but in parallel, each from their own tradition'. Their religious diversity, in other words, was not allowed to stand in the way of their expressing solidarity with one another, nor on this occasion with those who suffered in so many ways as a result of these attacks. Indeed, every meeting of the network begins with some form of religious expression, often silence as the Buddhists prefer, and with a reading from the sacred texts of one of the member groups.

In conclusion, it is worth noting one member's remark that interfaith relations are best learnt 'on the job'. The Springvale/Dandenong experience had been that the local governments had challenged the religious communities to take a risk by joining with the civic authorities in meeting a community problem. This challenge had required the faith communities to trust both the civic authorities and one another, and to renounce proselytism. It is perhaps as well, however, to recall another observation that there can be no model for interfaith networks because faith communities in every area face different situations to which they must devise their own responses.

The kit of this Interfaith Network may be viewed at the internet site of the City of Greater Dandenong: www.greaterdandenong.com

*Australian
Interfaith/Organisations
and
Resource
Websites*

AN ANNOTATED LIST of Australian Interfaith Organisations and Resource Websites.

This section lists the major national and state interfaith organisations in Australia together with other relevant major organisations and resource centres that may be useful to persons wishing to extend their network or access resource material or information regarding interfaith collaboration.

Australian Council for Christians and Jews:

The Australian Council for Christians and Jews is the umbrella body linking the following state and territory bodies. These bodies are groups of Christians and Jews who are drawn together because of their common heritage, a desire for understanding and dialogue and to explore their turbulent relations with each other. The aims are to counter anti-Semitism, racism, prejudice and xenophobia and to encourage dialogue, education, research and communication.

Council of Christians and Jews Victoria Inc:

Contact: Shalom,
179 Cotham Rd, Kew , 3101
Tel. & Fax: (03) 9817 3848

Council of Christians and Jews New South Wales:

Contact: 2 Devine St.,
Eskineville, NSW, 2043 Tel.: (02)
9351 4162 Fax: (02) 9351 2890

Council of Christians and Jews Western Australia:

Contact: c/o Moss Paul
Close, Duncraig, WA, 6023
evscott@iinet.net.au

Council of Christians and Jews Canberra:

Contact:
terryandjane @optusnet.com.au

Australian Partnership for Ethnic and Religious Organisations:

The Australian Partnership of Ethnic and Religious Organisations (APERO) was initiated early in 2003 as a result of discussions between the Council for Multicultural Australia and the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia with a view to advising the Australian government and promoting community harmony, inter-ethnic and interfaith acceptance, exchanging information about issues of importance, issuing joint statements, reporting on discriminatory behaviour and assisting communities at risk. Among the organizations currently represented on the APERO are AFIC, AMES, AMF, ATSIC, CMA, ECAJ, FECCA, NCCA, WCRP and members from the Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh faiths. This umbrella organisation, which is administered by FECCA, meets several times a year.

Contact:

The Secretary, Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia,
Unit 1, 4 Phipps Close,
Deakin, ACT, 2600;
PO Box 344, Curtin, ACT, 2605.
Tel: (02) 6282 5755
Fax: (02) 6282 5734
Email: admin@fecca.org.au

APERO Website:

www.fecca.org.au

Australian Federation of Islamic Councils:

The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, founded in 1966, is the umbrella body for the nine Islamic Councils of NSW, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory, Australian Capital Territory and Christmas Island. It coordinates many Muslim communities across the nation, sponsors the building of mosques and schools and represents Australian Muslims in governmental and interfaith affairs.

Contact:

The Secretary,
Australian Federation
of Islamic Councils,
PO Box 7185,
South Sydney Business Hub,
Alexandria, NSW, 2015.
Tel. (02) 9319 6733
Fax: (02) 9319 0159
Email: admin@afic.com.au

*Australian Federation
of Islamic Councils Website:*
www.afic.org.au

Australian Multicultural Foundation:

The Australian Multicultural Foundation, chaired by Sir James Gobbo, was established in 1988 with an investment grant from the Australian Bicentennial Authority. It aims to cultivate in all Australians a strong commitment to Australia as one people drawn from many cultures by adopting issues of national significance and initiating projects. In recent years, its focus has been not only on ethnic aged and multicultural youth projects but upon religion and cultural diversity issues, working with WCRP and the universities.

Contact:

The Executive Director,
Australian Multicultural
Foundation,
PO Box 538,
185 Faraday Street,
Carlton South, 3053
Tel. (02) 9347 6622
Fax: (03) 9347 2218
Email: info@amf.net.au

*Australian Multicultural
Foundation Website:*
www.amf.net.au

Australian National Dialogue of Christians, Muslims and Jews (ANDCMJ):

This dialogue venture was officially launched in March 2003 with five persons from each faith community appointed by the National Council of Churches in Australia, the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. Its purpose is to provide the opportunity for the national bodies of each faith to come together in peace and harmony in the Australian context. It hopes to be a model of how different faiths can live harmoniously together and to build understanding, good will and a sense of community between themselves, to share knowledge and insights and to support each other in times of difficulty.

Contact:

Rev. John Henderson,
General Secretary,
National Council of
Churches in Australia,
0419 224 935;

Mr. Seyfi, Press Officer,
Australian Federation
of Islamic Councils,
0412 318 045;

Jeremy Jones, President,
Executive Council
of Australian Jewry,
0411 536 436.

***Columban Centre for
Christian Muslim Relations:***

This Centre for Christian–Muslim Relations, established by the Columban missionary order, approaches Christian-Muslim relations in a Catholic context on the basis that God is experienced in many ways and that believers benefit enormously from each other. It organises conferences, meetings and inservice programs, publishes a newsletter “Bridges” and has a library and resource centre.

Contact:

The Convenor,
Columban Centre for
Christian-Muslim Relations,
420 Bobbin Head Rd,
North Turramurra, NSW, 2074.
Tel.: (02) 9488 8844
Fax: (02) 9449 4967
Email: CMI@columban.org.au

*Columban Centre for Christian-
Muslim Relations Website:*
www.columban.org.au

***Council for
Multicultural Australia:***

The Council for Multicultural Australia (CMA) was established in 2000 to implement Australia’s multicultural policy outlined in the 1999 statement, A New Agenda for Multicultural Australia. This statement was updated for the 2003-2006 triennium. CMA’s responsibilities are broader than interfaith issues but they are seen as important within its terms of reference.

Contact:

Chairman,
Mr. Benjamin Chow,
CMA Secretariat,
Department of Immigration
and Multicultural and
Indigenous Affairs,
Belconnen, ACT, 2616.
Tel.: (02) 6264 1002
Fax: (02) 6264 1073.

*Council for Multicultural
Australia Website: It is contained
within DIMIA’s website which
is www.immi.gov.au Click on
“multicultural Australia” on the
homepage, and then on ‘Council
for Multicultural Australia’.*

***Executive Council
of Australian Jewry:***

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), established in 1944, is the official representative organisation and spokesperson of the Australian Jewish Community. Its constituents are the umbrella Jewish bodies in NSW, Victoria, Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia, Hobart and the ACT, and it has affiliates such as the Australasian Union of Jewish Students and the National Council of Jewish Women of Australia. It is partner in various interfaith dialogues such as ANDCMJ, APERO and individual churches.

Contact:

The President,
Executive Council
of Australian Jewry
Tel.: (02) 9360 5415
Fax: (02) 9360 5416
Email: info@ecaj.org.au

*Executive Council for
Australian Jewry Website:*
www.ecaj.org.au

Griffith MultiFaith Centre:

The Griffith University Multi-Faith Centre was initiated in 1999, and the new building was opened in May 2002 as a result of a gift of \$1M by the Amitabha Buddhist Association of Singapore. It serves as a facility for worship, practice and continuing education in religious traditions, for educational programs for multifaith dialogue, for working together for understanding, peace and harmony, for modelling religious citizenship, for promoting research in religious cooperation and multifaith dialogue and for serving students and staff of the university and the broader community.

Contact:

Professor Toh Swee-Hin,
Director, MultiFaith Centre,
Griffith University,
Queensland, 4111.
Tel.: (07) 3875 7052

***Griffith Multi-Faith
Centre Website:***

www.gu.edu.au/centre/mfc/

***National Council of
Churches in Australia:***

The National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) is the umbrella organisation for the major Christian churches in Australia. Fifteen churches are members: Anglican Church of Australia, Antiochian Orthodox Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Assyrian Church of the East, Churches of Christ in Australia, Congregational Federation of Australia, Coptic Orthodox Church, Greek Orthodox Church, Lutheran Church of Australia, Religious Society of Friends, Roman Catholic Church, Romanian Orthodox Church, Salvation Army, Syrian Orthodox Church and the Uniting Church in Australia. In each state and territory, there is a State umbrella counterpart.

Contact:

General Secretary,
National Council of Churches in
Australia,
Locked Bag 199, Level 6,
379 Kent Street Sydney, 2000.
Tel.: (02) 9299 2215
Fax: (02) 9262 4514
Email: gensec@ncca.org.au

There is also another office in
Melbourne: Level 4,
Causeway House,
306 Little Collins Street,
Melbourne, 3000.

***National Council of Churches
in Australia Website:***
www.ncca.org.au

National Library of Australia:

The National Library of Australia within its website specialises in “Australian Religion and Beliefs on the Internet” which includes links to sites with a whole range of resources for people interested in interfaith issues. Choose on the homepage “Australian Libraries Gateway”, and then select “religious” from the “Library Type” box. It also currently lists 241 libraries that have significant, if not wholly, religious content. Many belong to secondary schools, especially Anglican and Catholic. Aside from one Muslim listing, all libraries belong to Christian and Jewish institutions. It is a very extensive listing with links to the actual libraries.

***National Library of Australia
Religion Website:***

www.nla.gov.au/oz/religion/html

South Australian MultiFaith Association:

This association is the only multifaith body in South Australia and it links into the WCRP world assembly. It is made up of members from nine traditions: Aboriginal, Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Unitarian. It conducts inter-religious events to increase understanding, sponsors educational activities, organises concerts and provides advice to the South Australian government.

Contact:

Ms. Jessie Kaur Singh,
4A Gordon St.,
Belair, South Australia, 5052.
Tel. & Fax: (08) 8278 3088
Email: jessieeks@hotmail.com

Uniting Church of Australia (National Committee on Relations with Other Faiths):

This reference committee of the Uniting Church's National Assembly promotes knowledge and understanding of other living world faiths and their communities in Australia and advises the Assembly on appropriate ways to foster relationships with such communities.

Contact:

The Chairperson,
National Relations Committee,
Uniting Church of Australia,
PO Box A2266,
Sydney South, NSW, 1235
Tel.: (02) 8267 4200
Fax: (02) 8267 4222.

*Uniting Church
of Australia Website:*
www.uca.org.au/relations/

Women's Interfaith Network:

Centred in Sydney, the Women's Interfaith Network (WIN) was formed in 1999 to address the absence of women in interfaith dialogue. Rather than engaging in the political or justice areas, it focuses upon the treasuring and sharing of faith. It links into WCRP (Australia) and is a member of the international WCRP Women's Organizations.

Contact:

Norma Aret
anet@compassnet.com.au
or Pauline Rae
paulinerae@hotmail.com

*World Conference
of Religions for Peace:*

WCRP (Australia) was formed in 1970 as part of the 49 member country World Conference of Religions for Peace, the world's largest coalition of religious persons working for peace and harmony, with headquarters in the UN Plaza in New York. It also links into the Asian Conference of Religion and Peace with headquarters in Seoul. In Australia, it has branches and sub-branches in Melbourne, Sydney, Hobart, Brisbane and Canberra. Its activities include working with governments for interfaith services, conducting research together with AMF and the universities, conducting educational activities and supporting local interfaith networks.

Contact:

Secretary,
WCRP Australia,
PO Box 1383, Carlton, 3053.
Tel: (03) 9379 3544

WCRP Australia Website:
www.wcrp.org.au

*International
Interfaith/Organisations*

AN ANNOTATED LIST of International interfaith organisations.

This section contains a list of international interfaith organisations, based initially on the organizations which, as part of the growing interfaith movement, met in Oxford in March 2001 to discuss more effective communication and cooperation between themselves under the coordination of the International Interfaith Centre in Oxford. Its website (www.interfaith-center.org) is probably the best resourced and best linked data source in the world. Another site that is particularly useful is at www.conjure.com/religion.html, and has a very extensive series of links to religious resources under a whole range of headings. It is headed with the commitment 'Religions working for a better world'. Indeed, this site provides probably the most comprehensive guide to religions, organisations, publications and other resources available on the internet.

This listing is divided into two parts:

- a. Key International Interfaith Organisations.
- b. Other Interfaith and Associated Organisations and Websites.

It is not claimed that these listings are exhaustive – one limitation is that we have confined ourselves to the English language.

a. Key international interfaith organisations

Each of these following key organisations has its own individual origins, profile and mission, and they are independent of any one faith community. Their details can be ascertained by navigating through each website and discerning its contents. They are listed in alphabetical order.

Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR):

The first Parliament of the World's Religions was held in Chicago in 1893 in conjunction with the Columbian exposition. This Parliament marked the first formal world gathering of representatives of eastern and western spiritual traditions. However, it would be a hundred years before the second Parliament was held in 1993, again in Chicago. It resulted from the suggestion in 1988 of two monks from the local Vivekananda Vedanta Society. It produced the document, *Towards a Global Ethic: an Initial Declaration*. The vision of CPWR is for harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities, enriching their commitment and contribution to a just, peaceful and sustainable world. CPWR has set itself the mission to broaden and deepen inter-religious understanding and cooperation, bringing the inspiration and wisdom of the world's traditions to bear on critical issues.

The Council's work develops in four strongly inter-linked dimensions: (1) Parliament Event – scheduled about every five years, Barcelona in 2004 after Cape Town in 1999. (2) Global - foster the engagement of the world's religious and spiritual communities with other guiding institutions to address critical issues. (3) Chicago - foster a vital community-based, socially-engaged interreligious movement. (4) Multi-Local - foster a network of vital community-based, socially-engaged interreligious movements in metropolitan areas.

Contact:

70 East Lake, #205, Chicago 60601, USA.

Tel: +312 6292 990.

Fax: +312 6293 552.

CPWR Website:

www.cpwr.org

Interfaith Youth Core:

IFYC is a youth-driven, international interfaith organisation committed to nurturing a new generation of compassionate global leaders through programs that integrate intercultural encounter, social action and interfaith reflection. Founded in June 1999 after the United Religions Initiative Summit a year earlier, the IFYC has initiated projects in Europe, the Middle East, North America, Southern Africa and South Asia. The IFYC is currently developing approaches to community-based interfaith work while also expanding and strengthening its international network of faith-based youth activists.

Contact:

IFYC, Pobox 408865,
Chicago, IL 60640 USA.
Tel.: +773 334 4480.

IFYC Website:

www.ifyc.org

International Association for Religious Freedom:

IARF was founded in 1900 as an organisation to bring together people 'striving to unite Pure Religion and Perfect Liberty'. It has 104 affiliated member organisations in 33 countries and 13 national chapters, mostly in Asia, Europe and North America, as well as individual members. The only Australian affiliate is the Australian Unitarian Association. The purpose of IARF is to work for freedom of religion and belief because it is a precious human right that potentially enables the best within our religious lives or in our search for truth or enlightenment, to flourish. It requires freedom from oppressive, outside interference or discrimination, mutual understanding, respect and the promotion of harmony (or at least tolerance) between religions and an essential accountability towards the rights of their own members and others. Encouraging interfaith dialogue and tolerance is part of the IARF agenda. IARF's strategic plan for 2001 - 07 has aimed to implement five different types of programmes specifically designed to enhance religious freedom.

Contact:

2 Market Street,
Oxford OX1 3EF UK.
Tel: +44 1865 202744.
Fax: +44 1865 202746.

IARF Website:

www.iarf-religiousfreedom.net

International Council of Christians and Jews:

The International Council of Christians and Jews links into 38 Christian-Jewish organisations around the world and acts as the umbrella body. It is committed to fostering mutual respect and understanding between Christians and Jews around the world. The website contains articles, reviews, reports, official statements and study resources on Christian-Jewish relations. Its headquarters in Germany are located in the house where Martin Buber lived.

Contact:

Tel: +49 6252 93120
Email:
iccj_buberhouse@t-online.de

ICCJ Website:

www.iccj.org

International Interfaith Centre:

The International Interfaith Centre (IIC) was founded by the International Association for Religious Freedom, the World Congress of Faiths and Westminster College (Oxford), now Oxford Brookes University. It facilitates networking, encounter, education and research between religious and spiritual individuals, organisations and communities throughout the world. The IIC promotes international interfaith activity to: (a) create understanding and harmony between people of diverse faith traditions (b) identify positive models to support cooperation, peacebuilding and human rights (c) address global critical issues and (d) contribute to conflict transformation. The IIC initiates projects, conferences, seminars, publications and consultancies to further these aims and encourage the peaceful and harmonious engagement of religious and secular people in our world. IIC acts as coordinator of the International Interfaith Network.

Contact:

2 Market Street,
Oxford OX1 3EF, UK.
Tel: +44 1865 202745.
Fax: +44 1865 202746.

IIC Website:

www.interfaith-center.org

Minorities of Europe:

Founded in 1995 as a result of the Council of Europe's campaign against racism, anti-semitism and intolerance, the Minorities of Europe (MoE) works towards the advancement of education, empowerment and civic participation of people, in particular of young people from minority/disadvantaged communities, through promotion of positive intercultural relations throughout the community of Europe. Its remit is broader than interfaith activities. It pursues its activities in observance of the spirit of international conventions and covenants regarding human rights, minority rights, women's rights, and endeavours to overcome and prevent discrimination based on criteria such as cultural origin, nationality, religion, race, sexual orientation and socio-economic background.

Contact:

40 Stoke Row,
Coventry CV2 4JP, UK.
Tel/fax: 0044 24 7644 3475.

MoE Website:

www.moe-online.com

Peace Council:

The Peace Council under the direction of its International Committee was founded in 1995 by a diverse group of eminent religious and spiritual individuals. Membership is by invitation. The Council works on the assumption that there is a spiritual dimension to all of life and that the world's religions have a wealth of insight, understanding, faith and hope to bring to bear in the world. In the face of conflict, injustice, poverty, discrimination and misuse of creation, the Peace Council frames its work in spiritual terms and strives to provide peaceful and constructive solutions in difficult situations. Its present initiatives include on-going work in Chiapas, Bangkok, Palestine/Israel, and the Korean Peninsula. Priorities for 2001-2002 have included Colombia, the Sudan, and Iraq.

Contact:

2702 International Lane #108,
Madison 53704 WI, USA.
Tel: +608 214 2200.
Fax: +608 241 2209.

Peace Council Website:

www.peacecouncil.org

***Tanenbaum Center For
Interreligious Understanding:***

The Tanenbaum Center was established in 1992 to continue the work of Rabbi Tanenbaum in the areas of interreligious understanding, social justice and human rights, especially in addressing the theological roots of prejudice and the encouragement of religious beliefs that build mutual respect. As well as conducting conferences and publishing studies, it conducts diversity programs for primary school children and has a Peacemakers in Action program for religious leaders.

Contact:

350 Fifth Ave, Suite 3502,
New York, N.Y. 3502.
Tel: +212 967 7707
Email: info@tanenbaum.org

Tanenbaum Center Website:
www.tanenbaum.org

***The Temple of
Understanding (Tou):***

Founded in 1960 by Juliet Hollister and launched as a global interfaith organization by Eleanor Roosevelt, is organised to promote understanding among the world's religions, to recognise the oneness of the human family and to achieve a 'spiritual United Nations'. Speakers at Spiritual Summit Conferences have included the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Mother Theresa and Thomas Merton. Videos and study guides of education programs make interfaith understanding of religious and spiritual traditions available for a wider public. An NGO with ECOSOC Consultative Status, the Temple actively participates in UN Summits and interfaith celebrations of the UN. Chapters exist in India, Argentina, Venezuela and the University of Maryland. Juliet Hollister Awards honour religious leaders, civil servants and artists whose work signals appreciation of the interfaith heritage of humanity.

Contact:

720 Fifth Avenue, 16th floor,
New York 10019, USA
Tel: + 212 246 2746.
Fax: +212 246 2340.

ToU Website:

www.templeofunderstanding.org

United Religions Initiative (URI)

Founded in 1995 in San Francisco, is a rapidly growing global community whose purpose is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously-motivated violence, and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings. The United Religions Initiative is a network of self-organising Cooperation Circles located on 5 continents and in more than 30 countries around the world. It is not represented in Australia. The community of Circles is sustained and strengthened by an effective communications and knowledge-sharing network, a vital and growing staffing presence in regions around the world, and focused support and organizational capacity-building in a wide range of areas including peacebuilding, resource-sharing and global fundraising.

Contact:

PO Box 29242,
San Francisco 94129,
California, USA.
Tel: + 415 561 2300.
Fax: +451 561 2313.

URI Website:

www.uri.org

World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP):

Begun in 1961 by a group of world religious leaders with its First World Assembly in Kyoto in 1970, Religions for Peace is the largest international coalition bringing together leaders from the world's great religions who are dedicated to achieving peace. It is the principal religious organisation used by the UN secretary-general to interface with faith communities locally and regionally and globally. Respecting cultural differences while celebrating our common humanity, WCRP has networks in 51 countries, including Australia, to promote multifaith cooperation, improve living conditions and bring greater security to all the world's citizens. Working on an international, regional, and national basis, Religions for Peace helps religious communities unleash their enormous potential for common action, mobilising collaborative efforts to effect change in the areas of (1) Conflict Transformation and Reconciliation, (2) Human Rights, (3) Children and Families, (4) Development and Ecology, (5) Disarmament and Security, and (6) Peace Education. In recent years, it has been working on specific peace-building projects in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Indonesia, the Balkans and, since March 2002, in Iraq.

Contact:

777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA.

Tel: + 212 687-2163. Fax: +212 983-0566.

WCRP Website:

www.religionsforpeace.org

World Congress of Faiths:

The World Congress of Faiths (WCF), convened by Sir Francis Younghusband (explorer and mystic) in 1936, is a pioneering fellowship dedicated to bringing people of different faith convictions together for mutual understanding, cooperation and dialogue. The Congress sponsors the annual Younghusband Lecture, which is given by a prominent figure of spiritual or intellectual stature, and organises conferences, seminars, retreats and pilgrimages. WCF's journal, *World Faiths Encounter*, enjoys a high reputation for its good scholarship and accessible reading. The newsletter, *One Family*, keeps members in touch with people and events. Although support for WCF is concentrated mostly in the UK, its connections are global. A number of members are used as international speakers and have many publications to their name.

Contact:

2 Market St, Oxford OX 1 3EF, UK.

Tel: +44 1865 202751. Fax: +44 1865 202746.

WCF Website:

www.worldfaiths.org

The World Council of Religious Leaders:

The Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders (MPS) convened at the United Nations in August, 2000, brought together 1,200 delegates from 110 nations - the first such gathering of religious leaders in UN history. The Summit's goal was to build an interfaith alliance to strengthen the UN system by bringing world religious leaders into the peace process. The Summit's achievements include the signing of a Commitment to Global Peace by the assembled delegates and an agreement to explore the creation of an international religious council which would be available to the Secretary General and UN community worldwide. MPS engages religious leaders in global issues through partnerships with governments, business and civic leaders and initiatives in different regions. It has now evolved into the World Council of Religious Leaders and its launching took place in Bangkok in June, 2002 at Buddhathon and at UNESCAP.

Contact:

c/o RuderFinn, 301 East 57th St.
3rd Fl. New York 10022, USA.
Tel: +212 593 6438.
Fax: +212 593 6345.

World Council Website:

www.millenniumpeacesummit.org

World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD):

Established in 1998 in a joint initiative between the President of the World Bank and the Archbishop of Canterbury, is an action-based dialogue among different religions of the world and between them and the multilateral development agencies (IMF, World Bank, UN agencies) on the subject of Poverty and Development. Up to now, the focus has been on an interfaith perspective on the nature of poverty, the relevance of religion and spirituality to development, and what the very aims and basic criteria of development should be. WFDD also has three country-based initiatives, in Tanzania on health policies, in Ethiopia on food security and other issues, and in Guatemala, where an interfaith group is working on a joint paper on the values which should underlie the development process.

Contact:

33-37 Stockmore Street,
Oxford OX4 1JT UK .
Tel/fax: +44 1865 790011.

WFDD Website:

www.wfdd.org.uk

World Fellowship of Inter-religious Councils:

The World Fellowship of Inter-Religious Councils (WFIRC) was founded in 1983 in India as a network of individuals, institutions and movements committed to interfaith dialogue at different levels. WFIRC is committed to work for reconciliation in areas of communal tension, to value-education with special emphasis on spirituality and meditation, to interfaith education, to interfaith celebration, festivals etc. WFIRC organises international interfaith conferences and celebrations, and publishes a newsletter.

Contact:

Fr. Albert Nambiaparambil,
Upasana, Thodupuzla,
Kerala 685584, India.
Tel: +91 486 223286.
Fax: +91 486 22353/485 833009.
Email: upsana_dr@satyam.net.in

b. Other interfaith and associated organisations and websites

This listing contains many useful websites about specific national organisations or particular faith organisations. It also contains websites with interfaith resources such as the interfaith calendar and prayers for interfaith or data on the number of adherents of the different faiths around the world (www.adherents.com).

Association of Interfaith Ministers
www.interfaithclergy.org/index.html

Auburn Theological Seminary Centre for Multifaith Education
www.auburnsem.org

Belief Net
www.beliefnet.com

English Religious Resources (University of Virginia)
<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/relig.browse.html>

Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education
www.csee.org

Global Ethic Foundation
www.weltethos.org

Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival
www.oneworld.org/globalforum/index.html

Global Network of Religions for Children
www.gnrc.ne.jp

Interfaith Encounter Association
www.interfaith-encounter.org

Interfaith Calendar Website
www.interfaithcalendar.org

Interfaith Voices for Peace and Justice
<http://origin.org/ifv.html>

Interreligious Coordinating Council of Israel
www.icci.co.il

JUST International Movement for a Just World
www.just.international

Monastic Interreligious Dialog
www.monasticdialog.com

North American Interfaith Network
www.nain.org

Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue:
www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/

Rissho Kosei-kai
www.rk-world.org

Sacred Texts
www.sacred-texts.com

Thanksgiving Square
www.thanksgiving.org

Three Faiths Forum
www.threefaithsforum.org.uk

World Council of Churches (Interreligious Relations and Dialogue)
www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/index-e.html

World Interfaith Education Association
www.web.net/~wifeaont/

World Peace Prayer Society
www.worldpeace.org

World Prayers
www.worldprayers.org

World Scripture (United Communities of Spirit – Global Faiths Initiative)
<http://origin.org/ucs>



Australian Government

Department of Immigration and
Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs



Australian Multicultural Foundation

**YOU
ME
AUSTRALIAN**

living in harmony