Diverse Faiths of Tasmania

Multicultural Council of Tasmania
Introduction

In the 2011 census, over 60% of the Tasmanian population identified as being of a faith, be it Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism or one of the many other religions practiced in Australia and the world today.

While we may be familiar with the names of these religions, the actual practices undertaken and ideas followers of various faiths subscribe to can sometimes remain a mystery.

While not all our members subscribe to a faith, the Multicultural Council of Tasmania has many members who are of religiously diverse backgrounds. In this booklet we aim to present introductory information about the major faiths practised in Tasmania and how they are observed. This resource has been developed in response to a reported rise in misunderstandings about faiths.

While the information contained is not representative of all faiths practiced in Tasmania, it provides a broad overview of major religious groups and key denominations. Community profiles in this booklet are of members of the Multicultural Council of Tasmania, and have been approved by the groups involved.

Thank you to the community for your assistance in making this project a possibility.
The unity of the human race is the central teaching of Bahá’u’lláh, prophet and founder of the Baha’i Faith. The word Baha’i simply means “a follower of the Bahá’u’lláh”.

The faith recognises the truth of their founders, such as Krishna, Buddha, Jesus and the Prophet Mohammad, all being considered Manifestations of the same God.

The Baha’i Faith has no clergy and is governed by councils elected at local, national and international levels.

The Baha’i Faith was established in Tasmania in 1949. From its earliest years, the Tasmanian Baha’i Faith community was actively involved with community organisations and continues to be today.

There are over 15,000 Baha’i in Australia and approximately 300 in Tasmania.
Community Profile - Baha’i community

The Baha’i of Tasmania are well known in Hobart through the operation of the Baha’i Centre of Learning for Tasmania. The centre is an educational institution, often used for conferences, seminars and meetings.

Regular events are held at the centre including Soul Food, a reflective gathering held on the first Sunday of every month.

The Baha’i community is also actively involved in neighbourhood development activities which are open to all people regardless of faith or background.

For further information visit www.bahai.org.au
Buddhism

Buddhism originated in India over 2,500 years ago through the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (also known as Gautama Buddha). At the age of 29, Gautama gave up all wealth and social status to seek answers to suffering. After six years of searching and meditation, Gautama gained enlightenment and spent the next 45 years teaching before dying at the age of 80.

Gautama’s teachings centred around four noble truths: the truth of suffering; the truth of the origin of suffering; the truth of the end of suffering; and the truth of the path of the end of suffering.

There are three main regional expressions of Buddhism that exist today: Southern Buddhism, Eastern Buddhism and Northern Buddhism. These three distinct forms are practised throughout the world, and are predominately found in Southeast Asia, East Asia and Tibet.

Today, all three culturally based regional expressions of Buddhism are represented in Australia and Buddhism is considered the second largest religion practiced in Australia, following Christianity.

Is Buddha a God?
Buddha does not refer to a single individual, but is rather a title meaning ‘awakened one’ or ‘enlightened one’. The original founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama, is considered to have been enlightened, but not divine.

Today there are approximately half a billion Buddhists worldwide and over 3,600 in Tasmania alone.
Community Profile ---
Tasmanian Chinese Buddhist Academy of Australia

Though the Academy is based in Hobart, its reach is global. The leader of the group, Master Wang, is the spiritual leader of more than three million people in more than 100 countries.

Master Wang was a finalist for the Senior Australian of the Year Award in 2008, and has been noted for his charitable efforts to the community.

The Academy is currently developing a Buddhist cultural park in Tea Tree, Tasmania which will be home to the largest Buddhist temple in the southern hemisphere. The project could take up to 200 years to complete.

For further information visit www.tascbao.org
Christianity

Christianity is a faith that worships one God. The Christian rests upon trust (faith) in God’s grace, leading to a life of wholehearted devotion to God and of self-sacrificing love for others. Followers of Christianity also look forward to the hope of Christ’s return and the resurrection of eternal life in a new creation.

Like other global religions, there is incredible diversity within Christianity. Some experts have estimated the number of Christian denominations worldwide to number in the tens of thousands. Such a high figure is difficult to verify, and illustrates the significant level of diversity present within the wider Christian faith.

Christians gather weekly, usually on Sundays, for prayer, singing, teaching, fellowship and usually also the sacraments (including the Lord’s Supper’ and ‘Baptism’, and Their Holy book is called the Bible and consists of two parts; a large body of scriptural text originating in ancient Judaism and a smaller body of text written by very early Christians. Spiritual leaders have various names and functions depending on the denomination, such as priests, ministers, pastors, bishops, deacons, and elders.

Are there core beliefs in Christianity?
Regardless of widespread differences in belief, certain core beliefs are accepted by most Christians. Followers generally believe there is one God who has three persons, The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit.

Community Profile --- Congo Life Foundation

The Congo Life Foundation was established by a follower of the Redeemed Christian Church of God. The group promotes multiculturalism, peace, and cultural tolerance in Australia.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God is a Pentecostal church. The church encourages abstention from all evil and reverence of parents and authority.

For further information visit www.connectingup.org/organisation/congo-life-foundation or facebook.com/Jesus-Reigns-Assembly-RCCG-Hobart-299335536770416/
In 2011 the Australian census documented over a dozen Christian faiths practiced in Tasmania, including Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant and Oriental Orthodox.

Community Profile
--- Korean Full Gospel Church

The Korean Full Gospel Church is a cross-cultural church providing both English and Korean language services, attended by people from many cultures.

The church provides support to the community through student support, a youth connect group, connect groups for others and English classes by arrangement.

For further information visit fullgospelhobart.org.au/
Hinduism

Hinduism is a culture and way of life where spirituality and enquiry into life are considered noble ways of living. In Hinduism, followers are encouraged to personally investigate the subtler aspects of life and, as a result, the religion has become very diverse, with practices varying from person to person, and different teachers sharing varying fundamental philosophies of life.

Although there are many deities in Hinduism, there is only one God, who is the source of all existence. Most Hindus believe God is beyond name and form, and can be worshipped through a variety of physical forms. They see all the divinities of Hinduism as different manifestations of the same singular God.

Hinduism also promotes a balanced way of life by encouraging followers to undertake fulfilling practises, such as meditation, community service and respect of others. By reciting three times Shanti (or ‘peace’) at the end of any mantra for peace, Hindus are reminded to practice and work for peace within the self and body, peace from other beings, and peace from natural calamities or the physical universe.

*Do Hindus worship idols?* Hinduism is not a religion created by a single founder, and hence there are many pathways of worship and realisation of life. Hindus worship an omnipresent God (a God who is everywhere) and who is beyond name and form. An idol is an image or symbol to cultivate devotion to God. There are different pathways of worship and realisation that are considered a personal choice, based on interests and understanding. Idol worship is within the pathway of Bhakthi (devotion). Other pathways are the pathway of Gyana (understanding), Karma (action), and Upasana (meditation). These can be done in combination also.

Today Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world with approximately 900 million adherents.
Community Profile --- Hindu Society of Tasmania

The Hindu Society of Tasmania is a not for profit organisation that aims to teach human values, and provide cultural education to younger generations who are interested in Vedic (a time period when the oldest scripture in Hinduism was composed) and Indian culture. The Predecessor of the organisation was “Shantinivas inc.”, which was formed in 1976 by like-minded people of Indian origin in Hobart. Shantinivas conducted monthly prayer meetings and established scholarship for needy students in India, and later merged into HSOT. The society aims to serve the religious needs of Hindu followers in Tasmania and does so through religious performance, song and storytelling, and events such as Diwali, a festival of lights that celebrates the triumph of good over evil. The Society stands for peace and harmony and is currently working toward building a cultural centre and place of worship.

For further information visit www.hstas.org/

Community Profile --- Bhutanese (Lhotshampa) community

Lhotshampa are an ethnic minority group from Bhutan with Nepalese origins.

The Bhutanese community of Tasmania estimate their current community to number around 2000 people, with roughly 1000 in Hobart and 1000 in Launceston. There are many Bhutanese led community groups in both cities, including Bhutanese Youth Hobart, DRUK Sporting United and the Bhutanese societies of Southern and Northern Tasmania.
Islam

Islam was founded in the 7th century. Followers of Islam worship Allah (Al-lah), a single God, and place importance upon both belief and practice of duties as a Muslim. There are many different religious groups within Islam, though there are two major global sects of the religion: Sunni and Shiite (or Shia). There are also many different cultural groups who practice Islam, for example the Ahmadiyya Islamic community who have an active group in Tasmania.

The history of Islam in Australia precedes European colonisation and was brought to Australia in the 1600’s, when Muslim traders visited the land and engaged in trade with Aboriginal communities. During the 1800s a wave of Muslim immigration brought camel trains to Australia, which made the interior of the country more accessible for trade. Immigration again peaked following World War II with Muslim arrivals from Malaysia, Turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Iran, Burma and Lebanon.

Today Australia’s Muslim communities are enormously diverse, and Muslims from over 70 countries are represented in Australia.

What is Sharia? The English translation of the Arabic word sharia means the path that leads to water. It is the moral, legal and religious code followed by all Muslims. Sharia is interpreted by different groups and nations in different ways. The majority of these are considered religiously progressive, with a minority of interpretations being fundamentalist.
In the 2011 census, 1,708 people living in Tasmania identified as Muslim.

85-90% of the world's Muslims are Sunni, whilst approximately 10% are Shiite/Shia.

Community Profile --- The Hazara Community of Launceston

Hazara people live principally in the Hazarajat region of Afghanistan, where they make up around nine percent of the population, and are Shia Muslims.

Australia is home to the largest Hazara community of any western country. Greater Hobart is home to approximately 350 members of the Australian Hazara community, a further 32 families live in Launceston. While a smaller community, the Hazara community of Launceston contributes to events such as the Tamar Valley Peace Festival and run a volunteer-led school for young Afghan/Hazara youth.

For further information visit mcot.org.au/our-members/
Judaism was founded approximately 4000 years ago. Upon fleeing slavery in Egypt in 1300 BCE, the Jewish people established the Israelite Kingdom with Jerusalem as the capital. Multiple invasions to the kingdom led to Jewish people spreading throughout the world. The modern state of Israel was founded in 1948, and since then the Jewish population has, to some extent, begun to return to this area.

There are approximately 14 million Jewish people worldwide, making Judaism the smallest major religion in the world. Jewish people live in many countries and belong to many different ethnic and linguistic groupings. In Australia, there is roughly 100,000 Jewish people.

The centres of Jewish communities are synagogues. Synagogues are used for worship, education, social pursuits, meeting spaces and for charitable work. The Western Wall of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is considered by many to be the holiest site in Judaism.

In 1788 fourteen Jewish prisoners arrived in Australia on the first fleet.

What is Kosher?
Kosher describes what food is fit and proper for Jewish people to consume. Rules associated with kosher are interpreted from religious texts, and include restrictions on what can be consumed and how food can be prepared.
Jewish life in Hobart is centred on the Hobart Hebrew Congregation, the oldest synagogue in Australia. The congregation caters for the needs of as many members of the Jewish community as possible, and conducts both orthodox and progressive services at different times.

As their names imply, orthodox and progressive expressions of Judaism, while accepting the Torah as its centrepiece, differ in their degree of adherence to its laws. Orthodox Judaism demands a more literal approach, while Progressive Judaism supports innovation while preserving tradition.

The congregation welcome enquiries and are happy to arrange tours.

For further information visit www.hobartsynagogue.org/
Sikhism was founded around 1500 CE in the Punjab region of South Asia. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism was a unique spiritual thinker whose religious ideas incorporated elements of Islam and Hinduism. His original poetry forms the foundation of Sikh scripture, and emphasis is placed on the importance of social cohesion and common humanity.

Sikhism does not override any existing religious traditions, but rather directs people to live in peace and harmony. Sikhs believe in one God and encourage followers to build a close relationship with God by living a pure and honest life, meditating in the name of God, and undertaking charitable work.

Today Sikhism is the fifth largest organised religion in the world with over 25 million followers. Sikhs have settled in Australia since the early 1800s and today make up approximately 15% of all migrants of South Asian origin in Australia.

**Why do Sikhs wear turbans?** For Sikhs the turban signifies spirituality and humility. Hair is also considered a gift from God and therefore sacred – so most turbans cover a head with long hair.

**Are all Sikhs vegetarian?** Sikhism forbids superstition and ritual, therefore Sikhs do not eat kosher or halal meat as both are prepared with some level of ritual. There is nothing in Sikhism that forbids eating meat, though in practice many Sikhs choose to be vegetarian.

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Community Profile --- Guru Nanak Society

Since 2010, the Guru Nanak Society of Tasmania has been at the heart of the Tasmanian Sikh community, which numbers nearly 1000 strong.

The Guru Nanak society is very active in the wider community, participating in and helping to organise events such as: World Games Day, North Hobart Football Club Multicultural Day, Lauderdale Football Club Cultural Diversity Day and Diwali in Hobart.

Langar – a free meal shared amongst equals, which is central to Sikhism – is offered by the Guru Nanak Society at all its public events and every Sunday at the Gurdwara.

The regular Sunday Langar is open to the public and the society encourages everyone to attend.

For further information visit gurdwarananakdarbarhobart.com/
Multicultural Council of Tasmania

The Multicultural Council of Tasmania’s vision is of a culturally and linguistically diverse and harmonious Tasmania that is just, fair and inclusive – where people with diverse backgrounds have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to Tasmanian society.
If you would like to learn more visit mcot.org.au