



# Report from Synod Interfaith Relationships Committee



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## Context

The Synod Interfaith Relationships Committee has been tasked with encouraging throughout the Synod an understanding of other religious faiths and promoting relationships with members of other religious faiths.

Current membership of the committee: Rev David Baker (chairperson), Rev Heather Griffin (secretary), John Agnew, Neil Ballment, Lesley Bryant, Philipa Core, Rev Bryan Gilmour, Rev Ann Hewson, Rev Garth Read, Julie Mackay-Rankin and Rev Susan Pickering.

Members have a good range of experiences and backgrounds in relating to people of other faiths. Most are active in interfaith work in Queensland and beyond through such organisations as:

- Uniting Church Assembly Relations with Other Faiths Working Group (<http://www.assembly.uca.org.au/rof/>)
- Multifaith chaplaincy in hospital and university settings (e.g. <http://wesley.com.au/patients-and-visitors/your-stay>)
- Christian/Muslim leaders group (contact Rev David Baker)
- Local expressions of interfaith cooperation between Uniting Churches and people of other faiths e.g. Emerald Uniting Church, Kenmore Uniting Church
- North Brisbane Interfaith Group – Interfaith in Action (<http://www.interfaithinaction.org.au>)
- Multicultural Advisory and Action Group, Gold Coast (contact Rev Bryan Gilmour)
- Griffith University Centre for Interfaith and Cultural Dialogue (Multifaith Centre) (<https://www.griffith.edu.au/community/centre-interfaith-cultural-dialogue>)
- Queensland Forum for Christians, Jews and Muslims (see <http://www.qct.org.au> – interfaith dialogue)
- Multifaith Multicultural Centre of Toowoomba (<http://interfaith-harmony.org>)
- Believing Women for a Culture of Peace (<http://www.believingwomen.org.au>).

## Report

Since the last Synod, the Synod Interfaith Relationships Committee (SIRC) has continued to work in two major areas:

### **Encouraging throughout the Synod an understanding of other religious faiths.**

#### **This has occurred through:**

- our website (<http://interfaith.ucaqld.com.au>)
- our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/ucaqldinterfaith/>)
- our annual lecture – *Living the faith in a pluralistic society*.

An ongoing project is working with the Assembly Relations with Other Faiths Working Group to develop a study guide to accompany the Uniting Church document *Friendship in the Presence of Difference*.

### **Promoting relationships with members of other religious faiths**

In addition to networking on a regular basis, two events have been specifically organised or hosted by SIRC. They are:

- *Journeying together to enrich communities* (Middle Ridge Uniting Church, Toowoomba)
- Gatherings of people of Christian and Muslim faiths with Sheik Alsharif ibn Hashim Alhusaini Almadani (a lunchtime leaders' meeting at the Uniting Church Centre, Auchenflower and a public meeting at St Francis Theological College, Milton).

## Key achievements/initiatives

### **2015 annual lecture: Living the faith in a pluralistic society**

This event was held at the Uniting Church Centre on 18 March 2015. Rev Dr David Pitman was the guest speaker. This was a Uniting Church information workshop to clarify how the Uniting Church understands, accepts and engages in interfaith relationships.

The goal was to have shared understanding on how we as members of the Uniting Church engage in interfaith relationships. What is our attitude and approach? David Pitman gave a summary of the Assembly documents in terms of encouraging us to be a neighbour. There is strong advocacy for shared community and there is certainly opportunity to get together, share meals, and have joint projects in the community.

However, the ongoing questions are: How do we as the Uniting Church engage in interfaith relationships? How do we live together? How does the church faithfully proclaim the gospel? How do we welcome the stranger and the alien? We believe that the spirit is here and the Spirit of God is alive and active in every context.

### **Journeying together to enrich communities**

28 March 2015, Middle Ridge Uniting Church, Toowoomba

This event was jointly organised by the Synod Interfaith Relationships Committee and the Multifaith Multicultural Centre of Toowoomba. It highlighted the work of the Queensland Alliance and the Goodwill Committee of Toowoomba. People from a variety of faith and community organisations were in attendance. Speakers included Dave Copeman, Rev David Baker, Haniff Razak, Venerable Wu Ping, Fr Brian Sparksman and others. The discussions and debates over lunch and during the afternoon session were lively and rewarding. Further bonds of friendship were cemented as community members came together to voice their hope for the region.

## **Challenges/risks as we progress**

Challenges in the work of interfaith relationships are many. The main challenge is, of course, hate/racism present in our society and born out of:

- a) Fear, or
- b) generalisation of the particular to the whole
- c) populism (within religions and within democratic societies)

(Words spoken by *Tariq Ramadan* at the 2015 Parliament of World Religions)

How do we faithfully follow the way of Jesus through all the complexities of life?

## **Proposal to the 32nd Synod**

That the Synod adopts the 2016 report of the Synod Interfaith Relationships Committee.

Proposed: Rev Heather Griffin

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## **Contact for report questions:**

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