



34 SYNOD 2019

Report from
**Synod Interfaith
Relationships Committee**



Discussing living a life of faith at the Synod Friends in Faith Iftar Dinner, 3 June 2018

Recent events in Christchurch, New Zealand, have resulted in much soul searching within the Australian community on the role that hate speech plays and has played in the development of violent extremism.

It is within this context that the call of Jesus for us to “love our neighbour as ourselves” (Luke 10:27) becomes paramount for we who would follow in his footsteps. We are called to be the salt of the earth, light in the dark places of the world.

And it is within this context that the Synod Interfaith Relationships Committee (SIRC) acts to support and resource the wider church.

SIRC has been specifically tasked with:

- (a) encouraging throughout the Synod an understanding of other religious faiths and
- (b) promoting relationships with members of other religious faiths.

This work is about building relationships, creating friendships, not arguing points of belief. Working in the interfaith space actually enables us to express our own Christian convictions with more clarity and greater love and respect for those who hold to other faith positions.

Membership of the committee as at 5 April 2019:

Chairperson: David Baker, Moderator (ex officio)

Secretary: Heather Griffin

Other members:

John Agnew

Heather Allison

Lesley Bryant

Lyn Burden

Philipa Core

Bryan Gilmour

Levon Kardashian

Garth Read

Focus since the last Synod

Since the last Synod SIRC has focused on:

- (a) assisting members of the Uniting Church to understand people of other faiths as neighbours and friends, as well as being able to articulate our own faith fully and succinctly as we share in faith conversations across religions.
- (b) working with people and organisations across the various faith traditions to come together in both formal and informal ways to discuss and act on values common to our traditions.

We have been cognisant of the release by the Federal Government in December 2018 of the *Religious Freedom Review: Report by the Expert Panel*. We are also cognisant of the *Human Rights Bill* passed by the Queensland Parliament in February 2019. These documents assist the processing by the community of the freedoms allowed within religious entities in Australia, especially when religious convictions are in disagreement with other human rights.

Highlights:

At the 33rd Synod, SIRC presented a Saturday lunchtime session “How do we build strong, resilient civil society in Australia?”. Associate Professor Halim Rane and Dr Nora Amath were our two Muslim speakers. Rev Brian Hoole and Rev Heather Allison presented the Christian perspective. Questions from the floor proved most instructive.

21 March 2018 saw the Queensland launch of the study guide to the Assembly document *Friendship in the Presence of Difference* at a lunch attended by Presbytery Ministers, members of the Queensland Faith Communities Council, the Queensland Police Service, Brisbane City Council and others.

On 3 June 2018 during Ramadan the Synod partnered with the Islamic Council of Queensland (ICQ) and hosted an Iftar Dinner at the Uniting Church Centre. Equal representation from those of Islamic faith and members of the Uniting Church ensured lively conversations and deepening friendships.

The Queensland Synod is a founding member and active participant of the Queensland Faith Communities Council (QFCC). Uniting Church representatives are David Pitman, Lesley Bryant and Heather Griffin (who is also a member of the executive). Further information on its role and the scope of activities can be found at qfcc.org.au

Members of the committee are active members of a variety of interfaith initiatives:

- North Brisbane Interfaith Group
- Multifaith Advisory and Action group (Gold Coast)
- Toowoomba Interfaith Group
- Believing Women for a Culture of Peace
- Together for Humanity
- Queensland Forum for Jews, Christians and Muslims
- Parliament of World Religions (held in Toronto Canada in 2018)
- United Religions Initiative regional conference
- Brisbane Southside Police Reference Group

Priority Directions

SIRC has primarily advanced:

Priority A

Enabling a demonstrated commitment to the shared call and vision.

Connects to: *Forming active and accountable disciples of Jesus confident in sharing faith.*

AND

Priority E

Engaging in opportunities for intentional, open community connections and partnerships.

Connects to: *Working for Christian unity; Engaged in authentic community relationships; Reaching out and speaking out for justice and peace for all creation.*

We do this through working within the church to enable people to more readily and fully articulate their own faith and, at the same time, listen more intentionally as others share their faith stories with us.

Challenges/risks as we progress

The major challenge for the church as a whole is the building of trust between people of different faiths, and the overcoming of fears within our own church and within society. This happens as we are truly honest about our faith, its history and present expressions (both good and bad) and the acceptance that many other faiths have similar histories.

For consideration

SIRC encourages members of Synod to consider ways in which their local congregations/agencies can interact with their neighbours of other faiths.

In 2019 the Muslim Holy Month of Ramadan is from 5 May to 4 June. The Queensland Synod is not only hosting another Friends in Faith Iftar Dinner in association with the Islamic Council of Queensland, but is providing support for other Uniting Church entities intending to host their own Iftar dinners.

One simple way to interact with people of other faiths is to start a small friendship group. Hold such a group at a local cafe where members of different faiths, proudly wearing distinguishing features, can sit down together as friends and share their common joys and concerns. Balance between numbers of participants from the different faiths is important. Such public displays of overt friendship are a witness to the reality of “you are us and we are you” as articulated by New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.

Proposal

It is proposed that the 34th Synod receive this report.

Contact for report questions

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