

Bridges

Building relationships between Christians and Muslims



No. 98 March 2023

Contents

- 1** From the Editor
- 2** Centre News
- 4** World News
- 6** Features
- 11** Coming Events
- 12** Columban Resources
- 12** *Bridges* subscription

**Columban Centre for
Christian-Muslim Relations**
 c/o Bishop Bede Heather Centre
 1-5 Marion St
 BLACKTOWN NSW 2148
 E: info.cccmr@columban.org.au
 P: (02) 9672 3616
www.columban.org.au



[/ChristianMuslimRelations](#)
[/AbrahamConference](#)
[/TheSydneyStatement](#)
[/YouthPoWR](#)
[/WesternSydneyWomens](#)
[InterfaithInitiative](#)



[/YouthPoWR](#)
[/TheSydneyStatement](#)

From the Editor

I am sometimes disappointed when interfaith does not get more attention in discussion, planning, teaching, preaching, and formation by religious organisations; when more religiously-committed people are not involved in the various forms of interfaith activities; and when religious leaders and their followers are so absorbed in their own internal concerns that they have no time for reaching out to others in interreligious dialogue. Interfaith seems a fringe, marginal activity, left to a few eccentrics like myself! I sometimes feel like “a voice crying in the wilderness”.

But while interfaith is not spectacular and usually does not make headlines, it is like the tide – slow, steady, inevitable, and inexorable. Although religious affiliation is declining in Australia, religions at their best still pose the big questions – what is the meaning of human life, of suffering, of right behaviour, of what, if anything, is beyond death, of our ultimate origin and destiny?

These profound questions deserve answers—and action—and that happens better when believers from different religions seek to answer them together and to work collaboratively in responding to the challenges involved.

The people whom we engage with and who visit us at the Centre are our partners and

allies in interreligious dialogue (see Centre News, p. 2-3). Individuals, faith communities and multifaith organisations are engaging with each other in promoting interfaith relations (see World News, p. 4-5).

Interfaith organisations are together tackling the major social issues of our time, the role of women (p. 6), domestic violence (p. 7), climate change (p. 8), the impact of artificial intelligence (p. 9), and they are growing and learning in the process and sharing that wisdom with others (p. 10).

Interfaith may be small. It may be marginalised. It may not make headlines. But it is not going away – and it is making a difference for a better world. Flowers are blooming in the wilderness.

REV DR PATRICK MCINERNEY

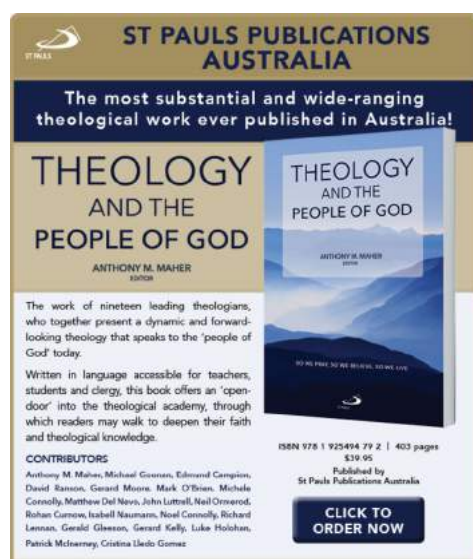




Western Sydney Women's IntHERfaith Initiative

On 22 November 2023, in a simple yet notable “dialogue of action”, the women of the Western Sydney Women’s IntHERfaith Initiative came together to generously donate and pack a total of 65 handbags with toiletries and sanitary products for women in crisis through the Share the Dignity “It’s in the Bag” donation drive. Share the Dignity

works with thousands of charities Australia-wide to provide donated toiletries and sanitary products to women and girls who are homeless or fleeing domestic violence or generally doing it tough. Included in the bags were notes of love and support handwritten by the women while they packed. Then, in February 2023, the women gathered for World Interfaith Harmony Week to share with each other what harmony means in their religious traditions. Story cards that spoke to a particular value, such as patience and forgiveness, were passed around and worked as great conversation starters.



Theology and the People of God

On 18 November 2022, **Fr Patrick McNerney** attended the book launch of *Theology and the People of God*. Edited by Anthony Maher, it is a tribute to Rev Dr Gerard Kelly, the former president and current staff member of the Catholic Institute of Sydney. Those who lectured at the Institute during his tenure wrote chapters on their area of expertise. The chapters cover all the major areas of theological endeavour and are intentionally written in very accessible language. The book provides a wonderful introduction to theology. Fr Noel Connolly contributed the chapter *Mission: Mother of the Church, Mother of Theology*, and **Fr Patrick** contributed the chapter *Interreligious Dialogue*. This book is highly recommend as a very accessible introduction to theology for teachers, workers, catechists, priests and clergy. For purchase see St Pauls Publications: bit.ly/3VT61Pf.



Muslim Goodwill Visit to Cathedral

On 20 November 2022, at the initiative of Ahmet Polat, Executive Director of Affinity Intercultural Foundation (affinity.org.au), a 15-member delegation of Muslims including directors, members and volunteers of Affinity joined the Catholic congregation at St Patrick’s Cathedral Parramatta for the Sunday morning Eucharist. This Goodwill Visit was a gesture of Muslim-Catholic solidarity. Bishop Vincent Long warmly welcomed the Muslim guests. After Mass, a reception was held in the Cathedral Hall. Bishop Vincent and Ahmet Polat exchanged formal greetings. **Fr Patrick McNerney** congratulated the Muslims for coming out of the comfort zone of their own faith community, and Alicja Borciuch welcomed them on behalf of the Interfaith Commission. We hope for further such exchanges between churches and mosques.



Visitors to the Centre

During recent months, we have hosted several visitors to the Centre. On 8 November 2022, Dr Malcolm Haddon, head of Community Resilience and Engagement at Multicultural NSW, and Annalise Awkar, Assistant Project Officer, Community Resilience (top), visited the Centre. They wanted to show support and encouragement to the Centre and to explore with us possibilities for revitalising Youth PoWR. On 29 November 2022, Fr Brian Vale (bottom), who holds the Columban Interreligious Dialogue portfolio in the General Council in Hong Kong, visited the Centre during his brief visit to Sydney on his way to New Zealand for holidays. Fr Brian was able to join **Fr Patrick McInerney** in discussions with Senior Constable Gary De Susa and Anne Ferfolya (centre), from the Engagement and Hate Crime Unit, Counter Terrorism and Special Tactics Command of the NSW Police Force, who visited at the same time. The police were curious to know about interfaith relations – it seemed they had not heard about it before coming across our Centre – to ask about our experiences of issues in the local community, and to offer their assistance for support in dealing with any and all forms of discrimination, including domestic violence, islamophobia and antisemitism. It is good that the interreligious expertise of the Centre is being recognised by secular government organisations.



Interfaith Christmas Celebration

On 16 December 2022, **Fr Patrick McInerney** enjoyed a pre-Christmas celebration. Nothing unusual about that, especially at that time of the year, with many businesses having Christmas lunches and dinners for staff. Two things make this event stand out. It was an Interfaith Christmas Celebration; and it was hosted by His Excellency, Muhammad Ashraf, the Consul General of Pakistan at the Pakistan Consulate General. The speeches and cutting of the Christmas cake were followed by a delicious Pakistani meal. As the invitation stated, “The event was aimed at underlining the message of peace, harmony and amity between different religions, and partaking in each other’s festivals.” A wonderful gesture of Muslim hospitality towards Christians by the official representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.



ISRA Graduation

On 10 December 2022, **Fr Patrick McInerney** attended the graduation ceremony for the Islamic Sciences and Research Academy (ISRA). It is affiliated with Charles Sturt University’s Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation and provides Islamic Studies and Arabic courses. In just over a decade, it has become one of the leading Muslim community and educational institutions in Australia. It is good that Australian Muslims can access quality Islamic education in Australia, as it gives them confidence to contribute better to Australian society.

It is particularly touching to see Muslim friends of many years graduate and go on to professional roles, including becoming staff at ISRA for teaching further generations. Congratulations and keep up the good work!



Papal Awards to Women Leaders in Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

Congratulations to Sr Elizabeth Delaney SGS (centre) and Ms Margaret Naylor (left) on being awarded *Croce Pro-Ecclesia et Pontificia* (Cross for Services to the Church and the Pontiff).

This is the highest recognition of lay people

by the pope and one of the Church's highest honours. Sr Elizabeth Delaney, a Good Samaritan Sister, has worked at various Catholic schools across Australia, at the diocesan level in Wollongong and Sydney, at the provincial level with the NSW Catholic Education Commission, and for 10 years at the national level as Executive Secretary for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. Ms Naylor worked in ecumenism for more than 35 years. She has been Executive Officer for the Council for Ecumenism and Inter-Religious Relations for the Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane since 2004. She has assisted the archbishop in building relations with the leaders of other Christian churches and other faiths. Fr Patrick McNerney was privileged to work with both awardees when they served together on the Australian Catholic Council for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations. Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3SoobYT and bit.ly/3lqqfSo.

Religious Leaders on the War in Ukraine

On 27 January 2023, European religious leaders met with the European Commission in Brussels to discuss the impact of the war in Ukraine on their countries. They acknowledged the suffering of the Ukrainian people: "We, as people of faith, realise that the inhabitants of Ukraine are enduring an appalling toll of death, destruction, and displacement," said Metropolitan Prof Dr Nifon of Targoviste, Romanian Orthodox Church. He expressed grave concern about any misuse of religious language to justify or support armed aggression, in sharp contrast to the Christian calling to be peacemakers. "We must continually condemn the war and appeal for peace for the people of Ukraine," said Metropolitan Nifon. "Our God is a God of peace, not of war and bloodshed." The Conference of European Churches president, Rev Christian Krieger, noted that "it is a time for Europe to assert and defend its values – values that reflect justice, truth, and pathways to peace". Bishop Åsa Nyström from Church of Sweden expressed concern for the plight of refugees who will not be able to return home for a long time. Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3qRaGCL.



Interfaith Alliance Release Report on Online Hate

US-based national organisation Interfaith Alliance has published a new report, *Big Tech, Hate, and Religious Freedom Online*, to educate people about the damaging impact of bigotry and hate expressed on social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. Drawing connections between religious freedom, people's online lives, and the big tech business practices that allow hate to spread rapidly through digital media, the report explores the ways in which hate and harassment undermine people's freedom to believe as they choose, free from discrimination. Read the report at bit.ly/3xoAwCL. Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/40XFyDw.



Bahrain Declaration Launched in Europe

The Bahrain Declaration is the call of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, the country's monarch, for religious tolerance and harmony throughout the entire world. It is based on centuries of Bahraini experience of multicultural, multifaith living. It was first launched in New York in 2017, then again in Sao Paolo in 2020. During Pope Francis' historic visit to Bahrain in November 2022 (pictured), he promoted peaceful coexistence among religions and working together against war.

On 26 January 2023, the similarly themed Bahraini document had a European launch in Rome. More than 300 dignitaries from Bahrain and Italy attended the gala event, along with more than 100 graduates of the King Hamad Chair for Interfaith Dialogue and peaceful coexistence from Italy and other countries around the world. *For the Bahrain Declaration see: bit.ly/3xPiGsx.*

For Pope Francis' visit to Bahrain see: bit.ly/3INI3CD. Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3KEyPcd.

The Manresa 2022 Multireligious Pact

Commemorating the 500th anniversary of St Ignatius of Loyola's pilgrimage and stay in the city of Manresa, and following Earth Day celebrations, in November 2022, Religions for Peace, in partnership with Manresa City Council and Religions for Peace-Spain-GTER, hosted a forum aimed at addressing social and environmental crises. The event, "At a Crossroads: A Multireligious Intergenerational Response to the Social and Environmental Crises", provided a platform for both youth and elders to seek together tangible solutions to pressing crises such as lack of housing, food, and water security; access to equitable healthcare and education; and more green space in cities. The outcome of the forum resulted in *The Manresa 2022 Multireligious and Multisectoral Global Pact for the Development of Resilient, Sustainable, Safe, and Inclusive Cities (The Manresa Pact)*. You can read the Pact at bit.ly/3EA4TtJ. To lend your support, sign the Pact at bit.ly/3xlmLPo. Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3SpePfd.



State of Social Cohesion in Australia: Report

The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute has released its latest report on social cohesion in Australia. Its findings build on national surveys undertaken since 2007. The original survey provides the benchmark against which the Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion (SMI) is measured. The report provides an overview in five core domains of social cohesion: belonging, worth, social justice, participation, and acceptance & rejection. Results from the

past two years show Australian social cohesion had strengthened across a range of indicators during the COVID-19 crisis. While there is expectation this may scale back to pre-pandemic normality, indicators suggest "interpersonal trust and neighbourhood cohesion remain high and resilient in 2022, while support for multiculturalism and diversity is high and continuing to grow". Nonetheless, discrimination towards groups persists. One-in-six people (16 per cent) reported experiencing discrimination in the 12 months to July 2022 based on their skin colour, ethnicity, or religion. The report highlights there is now opportunity to learn from what was done well, or poorly, during the pandemic to maintain a more cohesive Australia post pandemic.

Read the report at bit.ly/3xoAwCL. Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/40XFyDw.

Women Crucial to Culture of Interreligious Dialogue

Women's interfaith conference in Rome highlights role of women in dialogue

From 25-27 January 2023, the Dicastery for Promoting Interreligious Dialogue and the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations hosted a conference at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome on the importance of women building a culture of interreligious encounter.

The three-day conference, "Women Building a Culture of Encounter Interreligiously", consisted of women from around the globe representing Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Sikh, Zoroastrian, Confucian, Taoist, Jain, Hindu, Shinto and African Traditional Religion communities.

Delegates listened to interreligious initiatives from different contexts and worked to connect across their religious traditions and spiritualities through a 'culture of encounter', dignity and equality. Their aim was to build solidarity for "a growing re-humanisation of society through friendship, dialogue and cooperation".

With the exception of Pope Francis and officials of the dicastery, who offered greetings at the start of the meeting, all of the speakers at the conference were women. The World Council of Churches (WCC) was represented by Carla Khijoyan, WCC Program Executive, Peace Building in the Middle East. She spoke about narratives of building a culture of encounter:

"In the Middle East, different cultural, ethnic, and religious groups have lived together for thousands of years without the need of any kind of 'interreligious encounter' since they shared a dialogue of life," she said. "Confrontation happens in a diverse group when some feel threatened by the others and the sentiment of fear defines the relationship. Solidarity is a hand-in-hand encounter on the journey of justice and peace."

Conference organisers opened "dialogues" among the women "to talk, walk and work together to foster a better world where each upholds the dignity of all". The dialogues considered the role of women and women's leadership in social, economic, religious and political life at local, national and international levels; how respective religious classics, saints/sages, religious arts and music can be shared to reawaken spiritual energy to heal the world; and how to learn from the stories of women in fostering interreligious dialogue and a culture of encounter.



Pope Francis greets a participant from the interfaith conference "Women Building a Culture of Encounter Interreligiously".

Pope Francis observed that it is uncommon "for followers of twelve religions from around the globe to come together and discuss important questions concerning encounter and dialogue for promoting peace and understanding in our wounded world".

He encouraged the women to continue the important work of sharing with one another the insights and practices that give them strength and creativity as they strive in their particular contexts "to offer healing to many people who are seeking not only material relief from suffering, but above all, a sense of meaning and purpose for their lives". He was particularly grateful for their commitment and effort to foster the dignity of women and girls.

The pope also highlighted that the promotion of women's equal dignity and rights should be reflected in interreligious dialogue and cooperation more broadly. Affirming that more women at dialogue tables are necessary, where they are still outnumbered by men, the pope said, "Women have unique and indispensable gifts to bring to the building of this culture of encounter: among others, an inclination to listen to, understand, and care for the other, a persevering presence in the midst of difficulty, and maternal wisdom to make concrete and to nourish the desires and aspirations of our wounded humanity." Read the pope's address at bit.ly/3I8CcVO. See also WCC contribution: bit.ly/3IGQA9q. View the three-day conference at: bit.ly/3Ep8XNs.

NSW Interfaith Declaration Against Domestic Violence

Religious leaders commit to addressing domestic violence in communities

Prominent NSW religious leaders from the major faiths have signed a declaration developed by the NSW government to address domestic and family violence and better support victims.

The declaration, which was developed in consultation with leaders from the Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh communities, included a number of commitments drafted and agreed to by the interfaith group to address, respond to and speak out against acts of domestic violence.

Rev Simon Hansford from the Uniting Church said the signing of the declaration signified a momentous occasion, bringing together a diverse group of faith leaders to formally commit to working with the NSW government in ending family violence.

“Domestic and family violence occurs across the whole of society, and it does not discriminate,” Rev Hansford said.

Minister for Women’s Safety and the Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence Natalie Ward said the declaration demonstrated a whole of community response to domestic and family violence.

“This declaration by senior faith leaders has helped create a united sense of purpose, ownership and commitment to reduce the prevalence of domestic and family violence,” Mrs Ward said.

“Everyone can make a difference and be a part of the change in ensuring domestic and family violence is neither excused nor ignored in our community.”

Minister for Multiculturalism Mark Coure said when community and religious leaders and the NSW government work together, everyone benefits.

“We know these leaders play an incredibly important role within their respective communities and are looked to for guidance and information,” Mr Coure said. “The NSW government recognises this and our partnership with them is the key to connecting with communities more effectively, especially when it comes to important issues like domestic and family violence.”



The NSW Interfaith Domestic and Family Violence Declaration

We as leaders of our Faith, together with the NSW Government, affirm that domestic and family violence is unacceptable in all its forms. Domestic and family violence occurs across the whole of our society, and it does not discriminate. Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

We acknowledge that communities have not always been a safe place for victims, survivors, and their families, and because of that, we accept the important role we have in addressing domestic and family violence and commit to:

- Listening to victims of domestic and family violence and supporting them to access the help they need.
- Engaging with our communities to promote awareness and the respectful behaviours to prevent domestic and family violence.
- Accessing information and resources about domestic and family violence to support our communities.
- Denouncing harmful attitudes that contribute to domestic and family violence.
- Encouraging those who commit domestic and family violence to take responsibility and to own their actions.
- Respond and speak out against domestic and family violence.

We as leaders will promote dignity and respect and send messages to our communities that condemn domestic and family violence. Together with the NSW Government we will proactively work towards the reduction of domestic and family violence.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3ZyhNjU.

You can access the Declaration at bit.ly/3SPiHGG.

Ten Spiritual Principles for Climate Repentance

Consultations with 50 faith leaders creates visionary multifaith decalogue

While political leaders gathered from 6-20 November 2022 at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, for the Climate Change Conference (COP 27), religious leaders gathered on 13 November in cities around the world in prayer and support, offering a shared spiritual vision towards a resolution of the climate crisis.

Fruit of consultations with nearly 50 religious leaders affiliated with the Jerusalem-based Elijah Interfaith Institute, the *Ten Spiritual Principles for Climate Repentance*, echo the *Ten Commandments* given to Moses. To reinforce that symbolism, faith leaders planned to ascent Mount Sinai to launch the decalogue. However, when government restrictions made that impossible, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh leaders did a penitential walk, climbing to Parliament Hill, the highest point in London, instead. That evening, the New North London Synagogue hosted a world-first multifaith ceremony to “seek forgiveness for climate sins”. Similar services were to be held in Sharm el-Sheikh and other places around the world.

Dr Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, said, “We must confront honestly the destructive habits which continue to limit the possibilities and hopes of human beings, in a call for wake up and self-examination.”

Organiser Rabbi Alon Goshen-Gottstein said, “In order to cope with climate change we need to be transformed. We need to not simply make political decisions, we need to change our hearts; and to change our hearts, that’s the business of religion.”

The rabbi said a specially created oath, developed in partnership with the Peace Department non-profit organisation, could motivate people to do more when it comes to climate change. It says: “I, as a person of hope, pledge to do my best to make the world better for people and the planet each day that I may live.”

The *Ten Spiritual Principles* are available on a [dedicated website](#) in several versions – full, bullet point, poetic (see right), practical (with suggestions for concrete action), and scriptural (with supportive texts from Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu sources for each of the principles). The website also has a variety of news, photos, and videos about the event and the repentance service. We encourage you to access the versions of the *Principles* online, to pray over



them, to share them with friends and colleagues, and most importantly, to act individually and collectively “to make the world better for people and the planet”.

1. Acknowledge that creation is not ours to control and exploit; it is the vehicle of God’s action and the bearer of God’s gift.
2. Seek to open your eyes and heart to the God who comes to meet us wherever our eyes turn.
3. Do not forget that life is given us through all that surrounds us, and that our existence is a source of life for other creatures.
4. Labour for the shared good of all that is. This is what our creator has brought us into being to do, with gladness and gratitude.
5. Remember that what we do or fail to do today has consequences for our children and our children’s children, and for the whole family of created beings; do not defraud them of their inheritance.
6. Do not lay hold on the things of the world so as to feed the hunger of your private self. Remember that this is the way of death for you and for all around you. Be ready to repent of all we have done that leads us further into this way.
7. Remember that the gift of God has set us free from the compulsions of greed; do not walk back into slavery. Be agents of freedom for all you encounter.
8. Be mindful of the truth of who you are as a human being. Meditate day and night on the gifts of God, in attention, in silence, in adoration.
9. Do not turn your eyes and your heart away from the pain that human beings have inflicted on the home they share.
10. Test all that you do, say or think by the standard of compassion. Give to the world around you the love you need for your own life and health.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3EFwtWv.

For a report on COP-27, see unfccc.int.

Interfaith Leaders Join Vatican for AI Code of Ethics

Abrahamic faiths sign document safeguarding use of artificial intelligence

On 10 January 2023, Pope Francis hosted Jewish and Muslim leaders at the Vatican as new signatories to a document calling for a code of ethics for the use of artificial intelligence (AI) technology.

The *Rome Call for AI Ethics*, which was originally signed nearly three years ago by Microsoft and IBM, is an initiative led by the Pontifical Academy for Life. It invites leading developers of AI to sign an appeal for an ethical framework and guidelines for the field. The framework consists of six principles: transparency, inclusion, accountability, impartiality, reliability, and security & privacy. Since its inception, the *Call* has been endorsed by more than 25 institutions, private companies and organisations in an effort to build a global movement to create and commit to a new “algor-ethics”.

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, Academy President, presented the new signatories pledging to do their part in the ethical development and use of AI: Rabbi Eliezer Simcha Weiss, a member of the Chief Rabbinate Council of Israel, and Sheikh al-Mahfoudh bin Bayyah, Secretary General, Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace.

“We are aware of the moral strength that this event gives witness to” by having three Abrahamic religions come together with “other institutions to promote and safeguard our common humanity”, the archbishop said.

Not only do the world’s Catholics, Muslims and Jews share the same fundamental ethical values, about 80 per cent of the world’s people identify with a religious faith, showing the “vital contribution of religious leaders to a well-functioning polity and good governance”, said a joint statement issued at the event.

The experts, academics and religious leaders at the papal academy’s signing ceremony agreed in the joint statement that “voluntary regulation is insufficient for the pace and scale of technological progress” and that international regulation must promote transparency and compliance with clear ethical principles. The computational power of AI technology is advancing so rapidly that many ethicists, industry experts and governments are looking for ways to make sure the new technological possibilities do not become problems. Among concerns are AI replacing human labour; determining who is responsible for AI-generated



Sheikh al-Mahfoudh bin Bayyah of the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace, Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, and Chief Rabbi Eliezer Simcha Weiss, a member of the Chief Rabbinate Council of Israel, after signing the Rome Call for AI Ethics.

mistakes and misinformation; protection of privacy and limits of surveillance; the need for safety, transparency and fairness; and biases used in algorithms.

In his address, Sheikh al-Mahfoudh bin Bayyah said, “Laws and regulators must set standards that ensure the prevention of harm to individuals and societies.” Avoiding harm, he continued, includes suppressing “the human desire for wealth under the pretext of development and discovery if this involves harm or reciprocation of harm with others”.

Rabbi Weiss added that “intelligence doesn’t make the human being”, rather the source of human dignity is “the divine spark”, made in the image of God. “Being human will always be far greater than anything that is artificially created,” he said, which is why appropriate precautions and controls always must be present, so human life and autonomy are never at risk.

No “grand solution” exists, but there are “answers to what is the right thing to do”, said Dario Gil, IBM’s senior vice president and director of research. “Every tool can be used to benefit or harm, depending on the context or situation,” he said. “For example, AI-powered computer vision software can detect planets and stars in outer space and tumors or disease in the human body, or it can be used for facial recognition with nefarious purposes,” he said.

“We need all the help we can get to make sure AI is aligned with fundamental human values without leaving anyone behind.”

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3IF4OYk and bit.ly/3EITbUj.

Six Lessons Learned on My Interfaith Journey

Rev Dr Patrick McInerney shares Rob Sellers' lessons of interfaith dialogue

I heard Rob Sellers speak at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Toronto in November 2018. I met him one month later at the 5th Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies in Abu Dhabi in December 2018, and again a year later at the 6th Forum in Abu Dhabi in December 2019. Above and deeper than our Baptist/Catholic differences, we had similar missionary stories in Muslim-majority countries that included a strong Christian commitment to interfaith relations. We readily became friends. I am delighted to share his *Six Lessons Learned* on his "spectacular interfaith pilgrimage".

Rev Dr Patrick McInerney

1. All of us are relatives in one great human family. We are siblings, regardless of our distinctions and differences. Believers from all religions have the same kind of human experiences that mark the movement from birth to death. Our ideological and religious differences don't negate that innate kinship.
2. We are all a mixture of good traits and bad impulses. We all can be generous, kind, helpful and peaceable, yet we all also have the capacity to be selfish, unkind, self-centred and contentious. Each one of us can alternately exhibit good or bad behaviour, which is why interfaith relationships can serve to inspire the better angels of our human nature.
3. My work is better when I partner with those who differ from me. As former chair of the board of trustees of the Parliament of the World's Religions, the cultural and religious diversity of this executive committee, and of the larger board of 30 which I led, meant ideas and insights originating from many parts of the spiritual and physical world ensured I was consistently being sharpened and our work lifted to a higher level.
4. We can do more together than we can do apart. As *Ecclesiastes* 4:12 teaches, "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." Since all of us in the human family experience the same problems in life, it is wise to seek solutions to our common problems together.
5. My own faith is strengthened and enriched by the faith of others. There is much to be gained from engaging those whose religious paths are different. From my Pagan friend Andras, I have formed a deeper love for the earth, which gives us life. From my Jain friend Kirit, I have observed, at close hand, how morning meditation creates a calm and centred spirit. From my Wiccan friend Phyllis, I have been reminded of the feminine, birthing, nurturing aspects of the divine [...]
6. Participating in and promoting interfaith friendship, dialogue and cooperation is my new divine calling. Diana Eck, professor of comparative religions from Harvard University, explains, "Pluralism ... is the dynamic process through which we engage with one another in and through our very deepest differences." Following this definition, I have come to consider myself a "Christian pluralist" — by which I mean I am totally committed to Jesus and his claim upon my life, yet dedicated to the task of engaging positively with persons of other faiths.

Rob Sellers is professor of theology and missions emeritus at Hardin-Simmons University's Logsdon Seminary in Abilene, Texas. He is a past chair of the board of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago. He and his wife, Janie, served a quarter century as missionary teachers in Indonesia. They have two children and five grandchildren.



Published with permission from the author. For unabridged version see Baptist News Global, bit.ly/3Y2oz0r. For other reflections by the same author see 'Lessons learned on a journey of interfaith friendship', bit.ly/3Kytngq; 'Six reasons why the 'family of God' is more inclusive than we have thought', bit.ly/3miAHNy; and 'Six Scriptures undergirding my attitude toward other faiths', bit.ly/3SvLSOI.

Coming Events

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

March 2023

19 Bridge Day, thesydneystatement.org.au

21 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, un.org/en/observances/end-racism-day

21 Harmony Day, harmony.gov.au

23 Ramadan begins (tbc) (Islam)

25 Feast of the Annunciation (Christian)

April 2023

05 International Golden Rule Day

02 Palm Sunday (Christian)

07 Good Friday (Christian)

09 Easter Sunday – Resurrection of Jesus Christ (Christian)

14 Good Friday (Coptic/Orthodox Christian)

16 *Pascha* – Easter (Coptic/Orthodox Christian)

17 *Laylat al-Qadr* – The Night of Destiny/Power (tbc) (Islam)

22 *Eid al-Fitr* – The feast marking the end of Ramadan (tbc) (Islam)

22 Earth Day, earthday.org

May 2023

16 International Day of Living Together in Peace, un.org/en/observances/living-in-peace-day

18 Feast of the Ascension (Christian)

27-3 June National Reconciliation Week, reconciliation.org.au

28 Pentecost (Christian)

June 2023

05 World Environment Day, worldenvironmentday.global

04 The Most Holy Trinity (Christian)

29 *Eid al-Adha* (The Feast of Sacrifice) (tbc) (Islam)



Bridges

Building relationships between Christians and Muslims

Help us spread the news about the Centre and *Bridges* by sending us the names and addresses of all those who may be interested in subscribing to a hard copy (please complete the form), or invite them to subscribe directly online at columban.org.au/media-and-publications/newsletters-and-bulletins/bridges/

Columban Resources

All prices inc GST, postage & handling within Australia

SHOP ONLINE

www.thesydneystatement.org.au

The Sydney Statement



\$8.80 each
The Sydney Statement
A5 Booklet (36 pages)



\$19.00 each
The Sydney Statement
A1 Poster - 594mm x 841mm



\$11.50 each
The Sydney Statement
A4 Poster (10 pack) - 210mm x 297mm

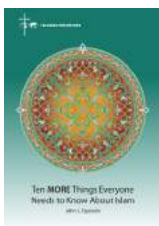
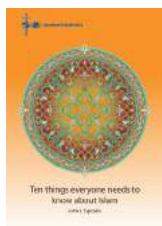
PRESENTS details of the values, principles and commitments named in this interfaith charter.

PROVIDES discussion topics and activities for schools, homes, offices.

SUITABLE for teachers, pastoral workers and all involved in community relations, especially between believers from different religions/faiths.

Booklet set – \$15.60 each

1 x *Ten Things Everyone Needs To Know About Islam*
1 x *Ten MORE Things Everyone Needs To Know About Islam*



Booklets sold individually
\$8.80 each

The Golden Rule



\$19.00 each
A1 Poster - 594mm x 841mm



\$28.80 each
A4 Posters (25 pack) - 210mm x 297mm



Bridges Subscription/Columban Resources Order Form

PLEASE FILL IN YOUR DETAILS BELOW:

ID: _____ Title: _____

First Name: _____

Last Name: _____

Address: _____

Suburb: _____ State: _____ P/Code: _____

Mobile: _____

Email: _____

Receipt will be sent by email.

I send my gift by: ☐ Cheque/Money order ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard

(Pay St Columbans Mission Society)

Credit card number:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Bridges subscription (complimentary)

The Sydney Statement A5 Booklet (36 pages) (\$8.80 each)

The Sydney Statement A1 Poster (\$19.00 each)

The Sydney Statement A4 Poster (10 pack) (\$11.50 each)

Set of *Ten Things Everyone Needs To Know About Islam* booklets (\$15.60 each)

Ten Things Everyone Needs To Know About Islam (\$8.80 each)

Ten MORE Things Everyone Needs To Know About Islam (\$8.80 each)

The Golden Rule (25 pack) (\$28.80 each)

The Golden Rule Poster (\$19.00 each)

My gift to the CCCMR:

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED

QTY

→ Number of hard copies

\$

\$

\$

\$

\$

\$

\$

\$

\$

\$

\$

Card holder name: _____

Expiry date: _____ Signature: _____



/ChristianMuslimRelations
/AbrahamConference
/YouthPoWR
/TheSydneyStatement
/WesternSydneyWomensInterfaithInitiative

Please send orders to: St Columbans Mission Society
PO Box 752, NIDDRIE VIC 3042 Tel: (03) 9375 9475 Email: info@columban.org.au

March 2023