



Initiatives of Change

'A new inner person': Life Matters course in Fiji

Two Fijian participants at the Life Matters course in Melbourne last July, Tui Tuivalagi and Aashil Prakash, were passionate for their friends to have a similar experience. They invited a small team from Australia to conduct a course in Suva, 25 November - 1 December. Chris James, a member of the team, reports:

Fifteen young Fijians, representing the indigenous, Indian and Melanesian communities, took part. They were students, newly-graduated teachers and young working people.

In introducing the course, both Tui and Aashil spoke about the steps they had taken to change their lives since the Melbourne experience. Aashil described the new relationship with a family member after having asked forgiveness for the constant conflict between them.

We began every morning with a wholesome breakfast followed by prayer and singing in true Fijian style. Then came a time of inner reflection and small group discussions before two main sessions. Topics covered included Teamwork, Family, Corruption and Resolving Conflict Creatively. In the afternoon there were interactive programs on issues affecting Fijian life. Volley ball and pool sports followed. Creative programs were scheduled for the evenings plus quiet talks through until midnight.

This course represented a new phase in the history of Life Matters, as a training manual has been developed to make it possible for any well-trained team to take

it to other places. The course is the quickest and greatest way that I have seen to open a space for people to experience change at a personal, spiritual and practical level.

A highlight of the week was the gift of Joy Pearce from New Zealand. Her teaching of drama, allowing the groups' surprising theatrical and musical talents to shine, created real-life scenes that showed the hard but inspiring life of the Fijian youth, the farmers and culture.

Participants felt that honesty was the strongest learning point out of the week.

Most people committed to renewing a relationship in their family or with friends, and to having a daily time of inner reflection.

Some of the comments from the participants were:

- A life-changing experience for me.
- It has taught me to confront a lot of things, one of them being fear, and how to be grateful for what I have got, instead of what I don't have.
- I learnt the importance of working in a team to achieve your goals, rather than being individual leaders.
- The Course has created a new inner person. It changed the way I think, act

and integrate with other people, especially other cultures and religions.

- It has made me more honest with myself and turned me into a new person.
- An eye-opener for me – the values that were instilled in me will really help me in my teaching profession. I have gained skills to tackle my real-life problems.

On the last day ideas were expressed about how they could take their experiences from the course to some of their communities. They will meet on 8 December to plan further.

Next Life Matters Course

The 17th Life Matters residential course for young adults will be held 15-24 February 2008 in Melbourne.

The last course was over-subscribed, so applicants are asked to register as soon as possible.

Course brochures and application forms are available from Initiatives of Change, 226 Kooyong Road, Toorak, Vic 3142, or by email: lifematters@au.iofc.org

Talbingo National Gathering

45 people met at a five-day National Gathering, as Initiatives of Change Australia's twice-yearly consultations are called, in the Snowy Mountains town of Talbingo, 8-13 November. Peter Thwaites writes:

The program combined refreshment of spirit with practical planning and addressing problems, particularly of finding personnel for the many opportunities to take action in society while staffing the basic running of IofC operations. Each day began with a prepared reflection; subjects were: "Identity"; "Experiencing life together"; "The future of IofC"; "Acceptance".

Perspectives were enlarged by a video interview with Mohamed Sahnoun in Caux entitled Visions for Peace and by a

talk on "Experiences with spiritual direction" by Mary Lean. Al Gore's film An Inconvenient Truth was shown for those who had not seen it.

We looked again at national objectives: indigenous relationships, finding common cause between faiths and cultures, thinking for the Pacific neighbourhood, training leaders for tomorrow, reaching out to the leaders in the economy and politics.

The gathering considered the running and the long-term use of Armagh, the

national centre. It was decided to form a Working Group to look at future options and to report within two years (by November 2009).

The next National Gathering will be in Melbourne, 25-27 April 2008. It is hoped that the long weekend and central location will enable more people in the workforce to participate, for the whole time or for particular sessions. We shall also try to continue the element of enjoyment which was present much of the time in Talbingo.

Identity and taboo

A reflection at the National gathering in Talbingo by Lesley Bryant:



Lesley Bryant

When I visited Fiji last year one lady grumbled as she was introduced to me, “Another Australian come to tell us what to do!” But when she learned my grandfather was born in Nausori her face lit up. On hearing his parents were Cornish & Samoan she nodded, “Mixed”. It was a shock to realise I was better off being identified as “mixed” than “Australian”, and to be glad of the change it made. I had seen the opposite change when, as a teenager, I was told by a relative that my great-grandmother was really a “Samoan Princess”! My brothers were as excited as I but my mother was SO angry that I had been told, we dropped the subject immediately – it was taboo! Some years later, when filling in a census form, I again broached the subject of our racial origins. Perhaps the fact that I proudly suggested my mother should tick the box for “quarter-caste” didn’t help – the subject was still taboo!

I now realise how stigmatising the words “caste” and “full-blood” are, particularly if non-Aboriginal Australians use them. They are offensive to Aboriginal Australians who identify as wholly Aboriginal and wholly Australian – much more offensive than

“mixed” was to my wholly Australian identity.

At the Brisbane conference I was asked where I came from and I said, “The Gold Coast,” but Pacific Islanders would say, “No, WHERE are you from?”. The penny dropped and I replied I had Samoan heritage. Their faces lit up with recognition and inclusion and they’d say, “Yes, I can see that!” It was the first time I had experienced anything like this. The Fijians realised they knew my Samoan relatives who were still living in Fiji! With the help of my Initiatives of Change Fijian and Samoan friends, we were able to meet our family. Granny Ninnes definitely was a “Taupo” and our new-found family were so welcoming that now we really feel like family and identify as such.

This reconnection has added a new dimension to my life – I feel whole in a fresh way. When Mum asked me recently to tell our story to her church group and everyone was fascinated and affirming, it was obvious she feels proud of her Samoan heritage now. Where there were taboos, pain, silence and rejection there has been healing in a way I could never have imagined.

My family experienced prejudice against Kanakas in north Queensland, and it is now 100 years since these Pacific Islander Labourers were forcibly deported due to the White Australia Policy. So I am challenged to see that at the 150th anniversary of Queensland becoming a state, in 2009, these Pacific Islander Labourers’ contribution will be recognised, and that Queensland will face up to its blackbirding past and seek reconciliation with the islands from which these people were stolen. I believe one reason our federal leaders have refused to speak about guest

workers from the Pacific is that we have not properly reconciled this aspect of our past (it’s still taboo!). New Zealand on the other hand has decided on an annual quota of Pacific Islander guest workers.

My dictionary tells me taboo is a Polynesian word meaning “forbidden” but it can also mean “holy”. Every society has taboos which in some ways provide structure to their fabric – they sanctify the shared bonds but also impose restrictions which can be alienating; taboos can force us into silences and conformity. Nevertheless we need an opportunity to honestly deal with taboos, especially when we relate to others new to our group or who express themselves differently from OUR social norm. Families have taboos too – things that are forbidden, protected or sacred. Jesus’ example cuts through the legalism that entrenched the “forbidden” aspects of the taboos and revalues the “holy” aspects that underpinned them. He reacted in a way that healed and empowered. How do we react? Do we have something that we are so ashamed of, afraid of, angry about or alienated by that we have not shared with anyone? We must uncover the taboos within us and our world – things that may be both “forbidden” and “holy”; things that need to be reconciled to produce healing and wholeness, just as Jesus demonstrated and I believe challenges me to do today.

The healing and wholeness that have come to me and my family and people I have met have in one sense been peripheral, incidental to Initiatives of Change programs and yet, in another sense, they are central. Initiatives of Change provides the safe, trusting environment, the opportunities for seemingly serendipitous interconnections without which the personal change and healing that underpins community and international

News of Creators of Peace Circles

Two more Peace Circles for women are coming to an end in Sydney. They have been held in places formerly considered to be areas of tension between different groups in the community of the Eastern beaches and Sutherlandshire.

A facilitators’ workshop took place in September and two of those newly trained leaders co-facilitated these recent circles. In addition, four Peace Circle

reunions were enjoyed, including one in Lakemba led and organized by three Muslim participants.

The Brahmas Kumaris asked for a one-day introductory Peace Circle in their beautiful, serene retreat centre in Leura, Blue Mountains. Joyce Fraser, one of the team who went, writes: “What a privilege to discuss inner listening with 26 women of all ages. Many had experiences to

share. After I shared my life story, it was very hard to stop the flow of discussion on families. We have been asked to return next year.”

A Peace Circle is meeting for the first time in Perth with participants from many backgrounds including Afghani, Cambodian and English Catholic married to an Iranian Muslim.

- Rosemary Thwaites

'Something that could save our society'

Last Newsbriefs carried a speech made by Diana Damsa from Romania shortly before she left Australia to go home. She writes:

Although I expected some cultural shock, being back home was not easy. I was hit by the new clarity I had gained overseas when I saw the state of our society and the heavy legacy of 45 years of Communism. I have talked about this legacy so many times but still have so much to learn and understand. I was overwhelmed not only by the look of my town – all patched and improvised trying to catch up fast with economic developments - but also by the feeling of a certain aggressiveness combined with hopelessness in people around. Our society has become more competitive. There are feelings of bitterness over the struggle for survival. Luckily my shock and melancholy lasted only one week. The more I looked around, the more I understood why I work with Initiatives of Change. Instead of feeling disillusioned, my conviction for this work grew even stronger. Catching up with friends, I could see that Romanians are looking for a solution - something that could save our society. They looked to me and my experience abroad for

inspiration and for a source of new initiative.

I was invited to speak to a class in one of our best high schools and was impressed by the maturity of the students. They mentioned corruption as our major problem and expressed the will to live in dignity in their own country. When I asked: "Who is going to bring the needed change? They chorused: 'We will!'" I realise how important it is to reach out to these young people and encourage them to get ready to take the reins of the country by starting now to be the change they want to see.

I was invited for a one-hour interview on television and had the chance to talk about my experience in my year of travel with Action for Life and other IofC programs. Afterwards my mother received numerous phone calls which confirmed that the message got through.

I now have to prepare for a few other school visits, an interview with the youth page of the local paper and a

Schools Leadership Conference

Earlier this year a few of the Armagh community were sitting with one of Victoria's Multicultural Commissioners, a prominent member of Melbourne's Islamic community Yasser Suliman. He told us of his vision to develop a grass-roots leadership for this country, starting in the schools.

We decided to work together on this project. A Schools Leadership Conference held at Monash University campus was developed. This was jointly hosted by Initiatives of Change, Diversity Connect International (Yasser's organization) and Altruism Australia, in partnership with the Victorian Multicultural Commission.

140 young people from 14 very diverse schools participated. The program consisted of a panel of speakers - including the 2007 Young Victorian Of The Year - lunchtime entertainment, inter-school discussion on the application of leadership values, and dialogue in their own school groups about possible initiatives after the conference.

A young Sudanese said, "In my homeland we have had wars and killing over many years because of the conflicting views that I grew up with.

Through taking part today I understood that dialogue is a much better way to deal with difference, even if we can't find agreement."

Feedback already received indicates an eagerness for a repeat event next year. An experienced senior teacher from one of Melbourne's largest private schools told us that he would like to help us to prepare it.

- Rob Wood

Staying on the Ball

Staying on the ball was the title of a basketball and life-skills camp held at Armagh over the weekend of 23-25 November.

The camp was jointly hosted by the Major Streetbasketball Foundation (MSF) and Initiatives of Change. Most of the boys participating were 13-18 years old.

The program was a mixture of "on-court" skills development with the three MSF coaches and sessions looking at lifestyle choices, healthy habits – like taking time for daily inner reflection – and long term goals which help to keep you going. The Armagh ballroom became the sleeping quarters for the 17 participants and leaders with mattresses spread out across its length and breadth!

A feature of the time was the honesty with which people spoke about challenges to heal relationships with family and friends and to find the courage to overcome peer-pressure issues like substance abuse.

During the weekend a strong team spirit grew which will help those who made important decisions and want to develop a new lifestyle.

The Victorian Multicultural Commission gave a generous grant, which covered most of the costs of the weekend.

- Rob Wood

Linking Farmers Worldwide

60 farmers from 14 countries and all five continents were welcomed in Pommeraye, Western France, for the tenth Initiatives of Change International Farmers' Dialogue:

Delegates spent the weekend with local farming families.

Kenyan farmer, George Kamau Kiiru, said: "I almost came to feel unworthy considering my one and a half acre garden compared to my hosts' fifty-seven hectares and enormous machinery. But as I thought deeper I found our main aim as farmers is to feed the world. I therefore multiplied all the groups, schools and individuals I had trained in my small garden and came to a sort of satisfaction that I am worthy."

Phil Jefferys from NSW gave an overview of the state of world agriculture and asked: "Why is there so much poverty in an industry that the world relies on?"

Jim Wigan's full report is at www.iofc.org

Farewell to Kim Edward Beazley, AO

The Hon Kim Beazley sr, reforming Education Minister in the Whitlam Government 1972-1975, respected Member of the Australian Parliament for 32 years and well-known for his work with Initiatives of Change (Moral Re-Armament) around the world, died in October aged 90. "Integrity and principle beyond political success" was the headline of the obituary in the Sydney Morning Herald, a theme repeated in the principal Australian and UK newspapers.

Three former Labor Prime Ministers, a former Governor-General and the WA State Premier were among the 300 mourners at his State funeral on 20 October in Perth. Eulogies were given by the Beazleys' two surviving children Kim and Merrilyn, by Professor Peter Tannock and by Jim Coulter, a past Chairman of Moral Re-Armament and long-time friend.

Jim Coulter's eulogy can be read at the Initiatives of Change website www.iofc.org. Extracts follow:

In 1953 Kim had been sent by the Australian parliament to the Coronation and then had come on to the world conference for Moral Re-Armament in Caux, Switzerland. I met him off the train and we immediately got into a disagreement. I was insistent on carrying his bag and he seemed to be determinedly egalitarian. No one was going to carry his bag.

Later that night, over coffee, Kim got into a spirited debate with two of his fellow delegates as to whether God could guide you. Kim agreed he probably could. When it was suggested it might be a good idea to write down any thoughts God might give, Kim demurred on the grounds that he had such a good memory he did not need to. But then graciously conceded he would try the experiment. The next morning Kim said he had been given the clear thought that he should make a policy of restoration to the Aboriginal people a central point of his public life.

In fact this "experiment" of a time of quiet prayer and listening became the early morning practice of both Kim and Betty from then on.

Kim was 32 years in parliament and 28 of those were in opposition. Many

of the changes he effected were when he was in opposition because Kim's motives were trusted on both sides of the house.

He and Sir Paul Hasluck worked together to help the 1967 referendum come about and when the Commonwealth Government for the first time set up a Department for Aboriginal Affairs, Prime Minister Harold Holt called Kim in to get his advice.

When he was up in Papua New Guinea as independence was approaching, the leaders of the Pangu Pati asked Kim if he would arrange for them to meet Australia's political leaders "on a spiritual rather than a political basis". Within weeks they were in Canberra with Kim arranging for them to have lunch with Prime Minister Harold Holt and to consult with Gough Whitlam. The luncheon with the Territories Minister "Ceb" Barnes was cancelled because of some of the abrasive things the Pangu Pati men had said about him in the press. Kim rang "Ceb" and said: "I have said much worse things about you than they did and you would still have lunch with me!" "Ceb" laughed, came to the lunch and established quite a fresh relationship with these men who formed the first Cabinet of an independent Papua New Guinea.

Kim was similar to Jimmy Carter and



Kim Beazley

Al Gore in that much of his most effective work was done after he had left elected office. His outreach took him to the Indian sub-continent, South Africa and America.

In *Amazing Grace*, the film about William Wilberforce, it depicts his dilemma as to whether he should seek to deepen his spiritual life or to make an impact politically. John Newton the writer of the hymn "Amazing Grace" told him bluntly: "Do both!" That is exactly what Kim, with Betty at his side, did so effectively in a life of service spanning more than 60 years.

A book of Kim Beazley's recollections is in preparation.

Creators of Peace International Conference

30 September - 4 October 2009

Collaroy Conference Centre- Sydney NSW Australia

For further information: Email: cop.au@au.iofc.org

Creators of Peace is a program of Initiatives of Change, an international, multicultural, multi-faith/beliefs network, working towards personal and social transformation in the world.

Initiatives of Change now operates in around 60 countries.

Creators of Peace International website: <http://www.iofc.org/en/programmes/cop/>

Australian website: <http://www.au.iofc.org/initiatives/pc/>

Correction:

In the last issue of Newsbriefs the song: Let's Create a Culture of Peace was wrongly ascribed to David Mills. The author is Rob Wood.

Cost of Newsbriefs

We are delighted to continue to send you Newsbriefs and Global Update on alternate months. For those who would like to contribute to the cost, \$25 a year would be much appreciated. Cheques should be made payable to Initiatives of Change.

All contributions of items, news, comments are welcome. Next deadline: Monday 21 Jan 2008, to **The Editor, NEWSBRIEFS, 1B Tadedor Court, Forest Hill, VIC 3131**
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