

Three ways to a cohesive Australia



PHOTO COURTESY OF CATHOLIC OUTLOOK

(left to right) Tony Abbott, Cardinal Cassidy, Sheikh Hilaly and Nadia Jamal

The Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Tony Abbott, and the Mufti of Australia, Sheikh Hilaly, shared the platform at a public forum in September in the multicultural Sydney suburb of Lidcombe. With the theme: "Towards a Cohesive Australia - a challenge for all communities", the forum was jointly sponsored by the Catholic Diocese of Parramatta, the Islamic Friendship Association and Initiatives of Change (David Mills reports).

The other principal speakers were Cardinal Edward Cassidy who worked for many years at the Vatican as President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, and *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist/author Nadia Jamal. 400 people attended.

At dinner beforehand the Minister met local Islamic leaders, three Imams from overseas, diplomats, police and other community officials. They were welcomed by Barbara Perry, State MLA for Auburn.

Cardinal Cassidy proposed "three ways in which we might work effectively in seeking to promote and consolidate a cohesive Australia... Firstly by establishing and fostering those basic principles of human relationship which make for cohesive co-existence; secondly, by creating possibilities of genuine interfaith dialogue; and thirdly, by members of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds joining hands to work together in ways that will benefit society."

Referring to multicultural relations in Australia he made it clear that being

respectful to the other party is not enough. "A positive outcome depends on something deeper, namely a meeting of minds. It starts off with a kind of "friendly co-existence", but develops through being together, listening to each other, working together, speaking together on questions of common interest and justice."

'fellow citizens of God's great family'

The basic change that has taken place during the forty years of internal discussion within the Catholic Church, as a consequence of the [Second Vatican] Council decisions, may be summed up, I believe, in looking at those who profess other religions, or no religion at all for that matter, no longer as simply being persons to be converted to Christianity, but as fellow citizens of God's great family to be respected, befriended and in this sense loved. They were not to be seen as "those others", but rather as brothers. This is of utmost importance in confronting cultural conflict...

from Cardinal Cassidy's address to the Forum

Calling for honest dialogue, Tony Abbott said, "It's important to avoid giving unnecessary offence but not if it means tip-toeing round the truth. I respectfully put it to Muslims that some

practices they dislike might be considered sins rather than crimes. Other practices they dislike might be regarded as tasteless or indulgent rather than against moral law."

In also challenging the Western world he said, "Combating terrorism means facing up to all the ways in which Western societies fall short of their professed ideals. How can alienated Muslim males be expected to respect women, for instance, when this city's bookstands, billboards and TV shows proclaim that women are sex objects? Muslims in countries like Australia are in a unique position to assess the strengths as well as the weaknesses of Western civilisation. They have the legal right as well as the physical safety (often denied to them elsewhere) to ask the hard questions about their own faith as well as about the faiths and beliefs of others."

The Mufti, who made great efforts to give his speech in English, challenged every Australian who is proud of his or her faith "to show the teachings and values of this faith through the effort he or she will offer to their society". Commenting on the cohesive nature of Islam he said, "From the outset Islam was quick to put an end to any notion of superiority based on colour, race or wealth. (It) transformed races into brothers and made all people equal with respect to their rights and duties."

In answer to a question about Australian values, Tony Abbott replied, "We need to give everyone every opportunity to learn English. How else can you have full participation?" The Mufti responded, "I agree with the Minister - we should all speak English. I have to at home or my children won't take notice of me. But it also enriches Australia when we keep our languages."

Born and bred in that part of Sydney, Nadia Jamal spoke of her Muslim identity. "I do not believe being Muslim makes me unpatriotic. (It) helps to make me a better Australian. It is about a fair go and respect for others. I too have been guilty of racism. We all need to call it for what it is when we hear it or see it."

In evaluating the spirit of the evening, Tony Abbott concluded, "I'm encouraged that discussions such as this are taking place. Australia can only benefit from intensive dialogue between Australian Muslims and people of other faiths."

Armagh's half century

This month Armagh is celebrating 50 years as the Australia-Pacific centre for Initiatives of Change. Peter Thwaites looks back over the history of a Melbourne institution:

"We've got the new centre!" said a young man in the Melbourne MRA (IofC) team to an even younger one (myself) fifty years ago. How this had come about, including the fact that C.N. McKay, the industrialist, had made an outright gift of his family mansion in Toorak to Frank Buchman's work, was something that neither we nor others knew, or would know for many years. Mr McKay had asked that the terms of the transaction be kept confidential.

But we were told the address and I went with my family to inspect the new centre. Turning into Kooyong Road we were a little taken aback to see a large but dark and forbidding house suggesting to me a witch's palace. It was only as we came closer that we saw that number 222 (as it then was) was the house beyond - a gracious building in a mediterranean style with cream stucco walls, set in its own large garden, and named "Armagh".

Hospitality

Armagh began its work as the Australian centre for Moral Re-Armament in the style of an embassy, for which it would have been ideally suited. Its interior beauty equalled its exterior. Buchman asked his friend and colleague Colonel Malise Hore-Ruthven, a Scottish aristocrat whose brother Lord Gowrie had been Australia's Governor-General, and his wife Angela to be the first hosts of the home. Despite the suspicion of many Australians for British aristocrats, the Hore-Ruthvens won many hearts with their grace and spirit of service. I heard my father tell how when Mrs Theresa Clements, an Aboriginal elder and mother of Margaret Tucker, came to stay, it was Mrs Hore-Ruthven who laid the fire in her bedroom.

Hospitality in those days was considered one of the main ways of conveying the message of a "new world". Not everyone responded as hoped. Some people were a little suspicious at being "wined and dined" (though there was no alcohol) in the splendid setting of Armagh. But many were simply touched by the care and respect shown to them - especially in the case of visitors from abroad or people from traditional cultures.

For a young person keen to know the world, Armagh in those days was the scene of exciting occasions. One of the first was the visit of the Japanese Ambassador to present a fine Okura dinner service on behalf of friends in that country. Such gifts were typical of the way the house was furnished for its new role. There were other Asian guests including Japanese sailors, Indonesian cadets and the Philippines Bayanihan dance company. For such groups our 20-strong chorus often learned the national anthem, and the tunes have stayed in my mind ever since. We learned the Brazilian anthem for former President Quadros and the Finnish anthem for Bishop Gulin. And when the Melbourne football team came to see the film *Crowning Experience* at the Athenaeum cinema we learnt the team song "It's a grand old flag...". Along with the music there were frequently theatre productions. In one of the plays, *Annie the Valiant* by Alan Thornhill, staged by the distinguished director Beryl Bryant Mayor, I had a walk-on part which I shared with wharfie Jim Beggs, the future National President of the Waterside Workers Federation.

After the Hore-Ruthvens returned to Britain, my parents, Michael and Honor Thwaites, were asked to be hosts, although my father had a full-time job in the public service. Armagh became our family home for seven years. For most of that period I was overseas but there were many others in the Armagh extended "family".

Stage productions

This was a period notable for further stage productions which then mostly went on tour: *Out of the Shadow* (Thaung and Williams), *We are tomorrow*, *Sing Out Australia*, *The Forgotten Factor*, *Wake up Matilda*. With so many of the young people joining these travelling teams, both in Australia and overseas, there was less manpower to run the big house which became difficult to manage. In 1971 the Thwaites were relieved by a new team when Chris and Janet Mayor, just returned after several years in India with their two daughters, took on the hosting job. Their period saw a new wing added



Armagh: - Centre for Initiatives of Change serving Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.

to the old mansion including an extended kitchen and second dining room, enabling the centre to expand its activities to include residential training courses. With the opening of the new wing in 1976 the character of Armagh changed again. In every year since then there have been one or two training courses - aiming to equip young (and some old) people to know themselves, discover the world, learn teamwork and find God's plan for their special contribution to society.

The first course in 1977, "Studies in Effective Living", conceived and launched by the late Stan Shepherd, catered for an international group including particularly some young Japanese. Over the years since then the courses have helped to create an Asia-Pacific network amongst successive young generations - though participants have also come from Europe, Africa and the Americas. They have undergirded the series of Asia Pacific Youth Conferences, such as that hosted in July 2006 by Indonesia. Rob and Cheryl Wood, Armagh's present hosts, have played a significant part in the development of this still growing Asia-Pacific network.

A basic answer to terrorism, as to other evils of our world, could be described as the building of international and cross-cultural friendships. This is simple to say, yet people and governments struggle to do it. Initiatives of Change, and before it Moral Re-Armament, has generated genuine care and concern across the divides over many years. Armagh continues this work today, as evidenced by the diverse and motley groups of people that pass through its doors.

226 Kooyong Road will remain an object of curiosity to some - the nondescript collection of cars parked outside contrasting with its exclusive Toorak location - and a beacon of hope to others.

Sudanese youth camp

A two-day bushland camp was held north of Melbourne for Northern and Southern Sudanese young people keen to play their part in initiatives for reconciliation in their homeland. Twelve people attended.

It was the idea of David Vincent, a Sudanese student resident at Armagh. At the recent *Agenda for Reconciliation* conference at the IofC centre in Switzerland, he had met three of the Sudanese cabinet. They offered him support for a conference in Sudan focused on forgiveness, healing and reconciliation.

The weekend was an opportunity to share our life stories with each other. Each one's individual choice to forgive the past and those responsible for hardships formed a strong foundation for the work that lies ahead. One man thought he should forgive the person who killed his brother-in-law and said, "The first thing I have to do is to convince my family." Yousif Suliman, who drove from Sydney to be with us, said, "In order to progress Sudan, we have to look at the past, present and future." He reported after returning: "You could see a new nation being built." Faten Mohamed, a North Sudanese, commented: "If we have patience and trust God and each other, things will work out."

A preparation team of four has been chosen to go to Sudan in November to set up the conference. A Melbourne rotary club will cover the cost of two airfares and has also offered help with further fundraising.

At Armagh we were preparing for two other events when a phone call came from a South Sudanese friend. "We are looking for a place where we can host a senior Sudanese economist from the World Bank who wants to meet with members of our community."

My wife and I took time to consider this proposal in the silence of our hearts and felt it was right to say "yes". Next evening there were people everywhere! Seventy-five Sudanese stayed till 12.30am.

The economist with whom I talked was thrilled to hear about the North-South Sudanese Youth Dialogue for Reconciliation and Hope and said that when those young people come to Sudan to prepare the conference they have in mind, he will do everything he can to support them.

Rob Wood

Other recent events at Armagh included the annual visit of Year 11 students from a local Catholic college for a one-day workshop to prepare them for leadership. On the panel was a graduate of a recent IofC *Life Matters* course, a budding film maker who showed a film about his journey from drugs to freedom - and basketball. The Year 11 co-ordinator said: "We teachers have to give out quite a bit. This morning has filled me up."

And the *Global Club* hosted an afternoon for 60 on "What am I meant to do with my life?" Career path counsellor James McIvor headed the panel. A Koorie told how he had found the strength to say no to alcohol by letting God into his life and is now helping others. A woman from China spoke of her decision to become a journalist to help uncover the truth about issues.

Rob Wood

Melbourne outreach

Discover the other



Students at the Australian International Academy learning to discover the "other"

The Australian International Academy is a large Muslim school in Coburg, Melbourne, formerly known as King Khalid College. 20 of the year-9 student leaders took part in a two-day *Discover the Other* workshop, engaging with enthusiasm in role-plays, group-work and discussions.

The workshop looked at tolerance and multiculturalism in Australia and at the common ground of moral values found in all the great faith-traditions. This was followed by interactive sessions on stepping out of your comfort-zone, listening, how to focus on "what is right" not "who is right", and "starting with yourself" - illustrated by North and South Sudanese who outlined the initiatives they

had taken to build trust between their communities after decades of civil war.

Students and staff have requested a follow-up session to help them apply what they have learned in a special project.

Mike Lowe

Seeing others seeing us

"Seeing Others Seeing Us" was the theme for the JCMA (Jews, Christians, Muslims in Australia) conference I attended in early July, with the hope of building bridges between this group and IofC.

There was an emphasis on getting to know and understand each other's faiths, and sharing prayer. Plenary themes included "What do I expect from dialogue?" and "How do my sacred texts guide me in seeing others?". There was time given to reflection in the style of each of the faiths, as well as studies of "difficult" texts from the Torah, Bible, and Koran (the less other-faith-friendly verses!). We looked at the way others perceive us in this secular society, and examined our responses to negative media, for example the cartoons depicting Mohammed.

As well, this conference helped highlight for me some of the unique qualities of IofC conferences: such as deeper personal sharing, and the emphasis on not simply theorising and fingerpointing, but starting at the point of real power - that is, with ourselves here and now. I hope to bring these values into the JCMA vocabulary.

We had been emailing about follow-up, but as the bombs dropped, so did our emails. I realised that this was more than ever the time to act on building and maintaining friendships, and said so in an email inviting people to Armagh for an informal "Halal/Kosher Pizza night". About 13 came and, as I had hoped, there was quite a groundswell of interest in Armagh (which happened to be full of Sudanese as well as a meditation group that night!) and IofC.

So after explaining, and handing out some of our "propaganda" including Melbourne conference invitations, we agreed there was definite interest in cross-pollination between our various dialogue groups. In particular some who have training in peace-building initiatives are keen to find out more about what can be done with and through IofC.

Laura Vertigan

Melbourne Conference 12-16 January 2007

In the New Year Melbourne will host a major international Initiatives of Change conference at International House, Melbourne University. Christine Waltrowicz, a member of the planning committee, has prepared the following article:

Australia is a developed country, geographically located near a number of countries with many needs, but is it helping others or helping itself? It is timely that the IofC Conference in Melbourne will reflect on "Australia as a neighbour - Bridging the divides with compassion, integrity and global responsibility".

Headlines over the last weeks and months make this task not only urgent but one which will be of interest to all who care about the future. Through the basic ethos of personal transformation which leads to social action, we will address the divides between haves and have-nots through three major themes:

"Living with the neighbour who is different" - beyond religious and other differences to the practice of good neighbourliness.

"Beyond the bottom line" - corporate responsibility and development as if people matter. How ordinary people can fight corruption and help create a healthy business and political culture.

"Australia's healing journeys" - Indigenous and other Australians facing the past and looking to the future. Australia and its neighbouring countries doing the same. Helping people heal themselves. What kind of ancestors will we be?

The conference will include personal

stories of change, information presentations, discussions, "peace circles", workshops which include specific topics in depth as well as practical activities such as painting and music, and entertainment.

We plan to provide an instructive and energising experience which will inspire us as individuals to work together towards a peaceful, sustainable future for everyone.

We urge you to mark the dates in your diary, take advantage of the early bird registration (full payment by 10 November) and think about friends you might encourage to attend. Don't forget to visit our website for further information: <www.au.iofc.org>

Conference invitations are available from the Armagh office or other IofC centres.

Book talk

New edition:

Corruption: Who Cares

by Brian Lightowler,

Completely revised and updated, has a new eye-catching cover and much new material from the Centre for Governance, NGOs, people's movements and individuals in India. \$9.95 RRP.

Available from Armagh 03 9822 1218. Cost \$7 post free for Newsbriefs readers.

New publication:

Listening to the Wisdom of Quiet Voices:

A beautifully produced coloured report of the Global Indigenous Dialogues held at the International Conference Centre in Caux, Switzerland. Louis Cardinal, Co-chair of the Dialogues says in his introduction:

"From the Blackfoot people of



southern Alberta, Canada to the Saami people of northern Europe and the Indigenous African nations, the Udege of Russia's Siberia, the Aboriginal people of Australia and the Maoris of New Zealand, Indigenous people have for over 70 years spoken and continue to contribute in the great dialogues and gatherings that have guided movements of peace and reconciliation around the World."

In the pages are thoughts and convictions from many of these people.

Available from Armagh 03 9822 1218 or Joyce Fraser 02 9559 2301. Cost: \$10 post free.

NB Please keep reviews of your favourite books coming.

Wise words on prayer

The "Tuesday ladies" meet weekly at Armagh to share their experiences and give practical support to the home. They also send out Newsbriefs. Jane Mills recently attended a meeting where they pooled their experiences on the subject of prayer:

- Prayer is a mystery. It is also God's gift. Mother Teresa said that, in order to do God's work, we need an intense inner life. When tempted to get into action, stop and pray.
- Prayer is a conversation with God, the Creator of all. He is able to guide if I listen and trust and obey.
- I am here because others prayed for me. When I pray for others I feel peaceful and much stronger.
- Prayer is friendship with God. "I'll pray for you" is a very important commitment.
- Pure prayer releases an energy. I have to add 'If it be Your will.'
- Write down a list of the people you are praying for and what their needs are. If the list gets too long, you can break it up into different days.

Continued from page 1 ➤

The event was held at Dooleys Catholic Club which donated the meeting room, the light refreshments at the end and the dinner beforehand for special guests.