



Initiatives of Change

Shaping character and more ...

In the last couple of weeks, following the Mohamed Haneef case, Australians have been made freshly aware that anyone here from overseas with a temporary visa must be of good character. And in the context of possible breaches of the law, this is not to be trivialized. However if being of good character really is important, what does it mean? How many of us 'residents' fall short, and how is character built?

Last month the ABC TV program *Compass* featured a young Lebanese Muslim on a 10-day trek up the Kokoda trail in Papua New Guinea. He had been apprehended for burning an Australian flag atop an RSL club at the height of the Cronulla riots in Sydney more than 18 months earlier. As part of his rehabilitation it had been agreed that he would do this trek to learn about what Australia's flag represents to those who fought for our freedom. It was a physical test of character as well.

Perhaps a similar experience could now be offered to one of the young Anglo-Australians who used the flag during the riots as a symbol of hatred and exclusion.

Whilst the law may often judge character, we are all responsible for building it. *Initiatives of Change* challenges people to explore personal and global issues that influence their motivation and character. One of its programs for young adults which contributes to this is the *Life Matters* course...

Life Matters course

With varied reasons for attending, differing expectations, fears, hopes and dreams, it was a unique and diverse group of individuals that gathered for the Life Matters course last month.

There were 22 young people from 16 different cultures and countries, including Anglo/Celtic/Italian and Aboriginal Australia, Romania, Maori and Pakeha from New Zealand, Solomon Islands, Fiji – Indigenous and Indian, Sudan, China, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

A nine-day residential course, it explores issues including identity, life direction, relationships, looking at the past through honest eyes and understanding its impact on the future, reconciliation, forgiveness and the four values common to the major world religions: honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. Also incorporated are workshops in managing conflict creatively, community building theory and practice, lessons in creative expression through music, dance and drama, and team building recreation.

After discovering the value in reflecting about the past, and seeing what could be made right, some participants decided to take action on different issues including: re-paying unmet debts to individuals and institutions, apologies to people who had been wronged and taking the initiative to

heal previously damaged family relationships.

Three young women came from Meningie in South Australia. They are part of the Ngarrindjeri nation of the Coorong. Rita Lindsay spoke of the discrimination and degradation she had experienced as a young person and of the new confidence and hope she had gained by being at the Course with a group of people who treated her with dignity, respect and equality. Sharing their culture with the participants was special for everyone.

Nu Khunnasit, a young international law student from Thailand, acknowledged that Australia was one of the last countries that he would have chosen to visit. But he said, "I was welcomed like a close relative, like a son. I feel ashamed for the attitude I had towards innocent people I had never met before." Metuisela Tuivavalagi from Fiji said, "I have learned to overcome my fears and developed skills in conflict resolution. Most importantly I have found the use of silent reflection as a tool for spiritual growth, meaning and direction." A Solomon Islands participant, Norse Kellyn, said the course had "directed all my challenges and

struggles in a different way to find solutions". Quang Hien Ngo, from Vietnam, shared that he would "never be the same person again, not so afraid and jealous, but committed to what I am supposed to do and who I am meant to be".

As they prepared to launch out, decisions were shared about the initiatives and projects that people will return to undertake. They included the organisation of an international youth forum for young Christians and Muslims, the expansion of the *Student Heart* venture (a youth-led program that distributes food to the homeless in Cambodia as well as building community learning centres), the support for *Winds of Change* - a group in the Solomon Islands focusing on anti-corruption/clean election issues through inner change, the ongoing development of the Cambodia-Vietnam dialogue, the strengthening of the Melbourne-based North/South Sudanese Youth for Reconciliation and Hope, the work for change in relationships with families and friends, and the decision to face up to and heal the hurts of Australia's history with the Aboriginal community.

Fiona Sinclair

Kenyans meet Fiji leaders

"The Interim Government challenged to give hope and prosperity", was the headline of the Fiji Government's own online report after a meeting in June between the Prime Minister, Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama, plus members of his Interim Cabinet and Initiatives of Change visitors, including Joseph Karanja and Lawrence Ngamau from Kenya.

The report continued: "Both shared their experiences of how they have been involved in the programs of building integrity and transparency throughout

Kenya, as well as reconciliation work between divided communities. Also present to share her experiences of facing and battling corruption in her country of Romania was Diana Damsa.

"The Kenyans came to Fiji as part of the follow up program to the Initiatives of Change conference that was held at the University of the South Pacific in November last year. They have been doing a tour of the South Pacific, visiting Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, as well as Fiji and Australia."

David Mills



OFFICIAL PHOTO

Joseph Karanja (far right) and Lawrence Ngamau (far left), Diana Damsa with guitar, Jone Dakuvula of the Citizens Constitutional Forum, and Rajjeli Bakewa and Balmindra Singh from Initiatives of Change, Fiji, sing a specially-written song for Fiji at the presentation to Cabinet in Suva

"Our experience in Kenya"

Part of what Joseph Karanja said at the meeting with Fiji leaders

Africa has the twin problem of Corruption and poor leadership. In the late 50s and 60s our leaders inspired us to fight for freedom. 'Seek the political Kingdom first and the rest shall be added to you,' one of them said. Today Africa is free, from Cape Town to Cairo. It is a free continent but many people's hearts are still in bondage.

My own involvement in wanting to make a difference in my own country started in 1994. I had just returned from India where I had spent six years studying Arts and Law. Like any other young man I looked forward to reaping the benefits of high learning. I never gave much thought to what was happening in my country. April 1994 found me doing an internship with UNHCR. At the same time genocide erupted in Rwanda and close to a million

people were killed. The events in Rwanda made me realise that genocide could happen anywhere. At that particular moment I launched a Clean Elections Campaign (CEC), whose aim was to fight corruption and encourage good leadership.

The CEC was an attempt to encourage every Kenyan to take responsibility for our country. The campaign took root very quickly as the majority of Kenyans were looking for a clean nation. The CEC guiding principles are:

1. The campaign is wholly positive in its approach. It does not seek to blame any individual or group, but encourage all to take responsibility.
2. The campaign does not aim to benefit anyone but it is for the good of the country.

Asia Pacific Youth Conference in the Philippines

From 20–28 July the 13th Asia Pacific Youth Conference (APYC) took place in the beautiful tropical town of Pagadian on the Southern Island of Mindanao in the Philippines. With 60 delegates from 11 countries arriving by plane and then bus, they were received with an overwhelming welcome as children lined the streets waving national flags and dancing, and drumming bands played.

The APYC was built on the conviction of four Philipinos, Efren Buendia, Aries Gamboa, Jenny Padua, and Star Parulan. With Star, some

young professionals from different sectors came together, including the manager of the resort where APYC took place, a young hotelier, an Army captain, and the head of the youth department of the Mayor. Each joined not knowing what Initiatives of Change was but feeling that this conference might make a difference in their town.

The Pacific was well represented with Naomi Tate Kelah and Martin Moali from Solomon Islands, both speaking about the Winds of Change Clean Election Campaign. They shared their

3. The campaign highlights that change must start with me. We cannot clean a table with a dirty cloth. If I want to clean up my country, I must clean myself first.

Impossible? Not at all. The inner voice, the voice of God or conscience is available to all of us to show us what is right.

Fighting corruption and attempting to dismantle its networks can be dangerous. I had that fear especially when I received calls threatening me.

My country is going to the polls this coming December. We realise that we can plan our nation on paper but we can only build it with people. It is my hope that the civil, parliamentary and presidential elections in Africa will give us straight thinkers as our leaders. Somebody said, "You cannot live crooked and think straight." We are on the move all over Africa and we shall not stop till the job is done.

experience of rebuilding their own lives after the violence in their nation. From Fiji there was Balmindra Singh, Emele Waqa, Paulini Vesikula and Roneel Prakash who spoke of their plans to work towards some training camps and a youth conference in December. From Australia Nigel Heywood participated and will travel on through Asia visiting the young team who have supported Action for Life.

At the end of the conference one delegate who works with the local Mayor said that their office could be used for the newly-formed IofC team in Pagadian. They met together as soon as the conference was finished to work out what their next steps will be.

Nigel Heywood

Trust across the world's divides? - Dignity for all?

John Bond reports on the July/August conferences at the international Initiatives of Change Centre in Caux, Switzerland.

Caux is a place of unexpected encounters. In one forum, an American described the major oil development with which he is working in central Africa. An African who lives in that area immediately stood up and described the tragic consequences on his village of this development. This led to an exchange which enabled all those present, including many business people, to better understand the pressures on the differing interests involved. Later the American discussed the situation with Mohamed Sahnoun, whose role as Special Advisor on Africa to the UN Secretary-General has given him an intimate understanding of the political forces in that part of Africa.

This session on *Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy* was hosted by the Caux Initiatives for Business (CIB) and supported by a team of business professionals led by Mohan Bhagwandas from Melbourne. Having worked with an award-winning software company, Mohan has now launched out on his own, partly to give himself the time to develop the CIB program worldwide.

The world's largest business is the media, and the conference included the *International Communications Forum* (ICF), a network of media people in many countries which is working to heighten integrity at all levels from journalist to senior executive. "There is a magic here at Caux," said a British businessman who founded Europe's largest public relations consultancy, outlining his plans to bring colleagues to the next ICF gathering here.

Eastern Europeans were also prominent in the July conferences, with large groups from Russia, Ukraine and Moldova. They included the leaders of a

Ukrainian initiative, known as Student Republic, aimed at developing democracy in the country. Each summer they gather hundreds of students to camps in the Crimea, where they hold mock elections and debate national topics with vigour. They had come to Caux, they said, because they recognise the need to strengthen the moral foundations of democracy.

Openness and Trust across Generations attracted 409 participants, 250 of whom were under 40 years old and 78 under 18. Workshops took place all over the house, clowns invaded the meetings to the children's delight and there was vigorous competition in the "Cauxlympics" races. As the first plenaries were taking place, a simultaneous commentary was broadcast on the internet.

Across the world, people logged on and were able to give their ideas to the meeting.

In August *Tools for Change* will bring together many people wanting to learn how to be agents of constructive change. To the *Global Indigenous Dialogue* will come people from numerous countries including Rev Ray Minniecon and his wife Sharon from Australia. Dr Visier Sanyü, who works with refugees and displaced people through the National Council of Churches in Australia, delivered a Caux Lecture on *Voice of the Voiceless: Trustbuilding in a Divided World*.

The final session, *Can Integrity, Respect and Trust Lead to Dignity for All?* will cater for people from Africa, the Middle East and other regions of conflict and tension.

Dr Habib Chirzin, the Indonesian Human Rights Commissioner who attended the IofC Conference in Brisbane in 2005, will be among the delegates.

Australian news roundup

The *Imam and the Pastor*, a new DVD story of reconciliation and hope from Nigeria, continues to be used for private and public showings. In **Perth** a public showing drew 60 people who stayed long afterwards discussing its relevance to their own situations. In **Sydney**, a public showing sponsored by the Hills Interfaith Dialogue Group and the Baulkham Hills Council also drew 60 people. It was accompanied by two speakers from the Melbourne-based *Sudanese Youth for Reconciliation and Hope*. There are plans afoot for further use of the DVD in the Hills community and schools. A month later, a private showing in a home in Sutherland Shire drew 16 people who are also planning a wider community viewing. The Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations created a public occasion on 7 August, following the showing with an open discussion led by a local Imam and Pastor. In **Brisbane** there was a showing at the auditorium of Multicultural Affairs Queensland on 7 August, on the invitation of the CEO, Steve Maguire. In **Toowoomba**, the Minister of Middle Ridge's Uniting Church screened extracts during a sermon to demonstrate the power of forgiveness. In **Melbourne**, 50 people viewed the DVD at Armagh, including a Muslim research scholar who is working with a Jewish scholar at his university to engage students from the Middle East in conflict resolution.

A further *Discover the Other* workshop was given at the Australian International Academy in Coburg (see article in June *Newsbriefs*) on 23 July.

A *dinner for Victorian Governor* Professor David de Kretser AC and Mrs Jan de Kretser was hosted at Armagh on 30 July by the *Sudanese Youth for Reconciliation and Hope*.

Action for Life 4 takes off

Action for Life 4 has been officially launched. The course will commence in India on 1 October 2008 and go for seven months. Action for Life aims to develop a new generation of change makers equipped with integrity and faith who are committed to transformation in the world by starting with themselves. The AfL core team, Alexander Birnberg (Australia), Chris Breitenberg (USA), Nigel Heywood (Australia), Leena Khatri (India), Suresh Khatri (Fiji), Hanting Pan (Taiwan) would be grateful for your prayers and support as they face the challenge of gathering the resources required. For further information, log on to www.afl.iofc.org

Creators of Peace circles continue to flourish in Sydney. To learn more visit www.au.iofc.org/initiatives/pc. Three new series have been completed this year and one is in train. Sunday 12 August saw the second annual *Creators of Peace Celebration*, a lunch and afternoon program at Belmore Community Centre featuring two speakers from Action for Life 3, Long Seng To and Diana Damsa.

The world is your family

Marguerite and Paul Craig from the United Kingdom spent almost four years in Solomon Islands, returning home in July 2007. Below are extracts from a talk Marguerite gave at the IofC 'Who is my Neighbour?' conference in Melbourne in January, and a postscript from Paul.

Marguerite: I have a great fear of flying. This is not good when married to a tropical agriculturalist and living in the UK. Paul would come home and say to me, "How would you like to come and live in Nigeria – Saudi Arabia – Zambia – Papua New Guinea – Solomon Islands?" And each time my answer would be the same: "No thanks, I'm very happy where I am." Again and again I have had to give my fears to God. At times I have cursed Paul and his chosen job. My dream was always to live in the same street as all my family. Friends would live in the outlying villages and I could bicycle out to see them. No need to have a car, let alone go on an aeroplane!

Well, God had other plans for us. We have now lived in 7 different countries in our 33 years of marriage. We lived in 12 different homes in our first 10 years of marriage. But what is amazing is that you can overcome the things you are most frightened of – and as you do that and go towards your fears, you not only grow as a person, but you grow closer to God and your faith is kindled and blessed.

These last years in Solomon Islands have been truly amazing – the friendships we have made, the adventures we have had. We have also had the privilege of

working with the small, but dynamic group called Winds of Change. This is a group of mostly young people who have not only led a Clean Election Campaign in these islands but have also put many things right with their families and have gone out to help Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

We have also experienced riots and the burning of Chinatown in Honiara. We have had to help rescue a friend from a burning hotel. We have landed in tiny islands, where the cattle are used to keep the grass down on the runway, just missing coconut palms. We have dived to the depths of the ocean and seen hundreds of rainbow-coloured fish. We have visited people who are totally cut off from society, to help them with school materials and general support. I have volunteered in schools with classes of 60 and only 30 pencils between them.

God has spoken quite clearly to me. He has said, "The world is your family. It is not just your children, parents and good friends. Open your heart. There are so many people out there who need your love and help." I am grateful to have a husband who demands the best of me and a God who loves me and challenges me all the time to move out of that 'comfort zone' which leaves little room for growth or movement.



PHOTO: JANE MILLS

Paul and Marguerite Craig

Paul: I worked on the European Union portfolio of aid programs and Marguerite taught successive classes at the International School, but together we were involved in so much more. We supported the growth of a group of mainly young volunteers who formed Winds of Change and are committed to the development of their young country freed from corruption. Their message that change starts with oneself proved to be both a challenge and an inspiration. We have also appreciated our link with the Melanesian Brothers, an Anglican order who are a humble but joyful force of nation builders engaged in the same battle. Whilst we are clear it is the right time for us to return to the UK, we leave Solomon Islands with a concern that these somewhat fragile initiatives receive the support they need to grow and operate.

National Gathering in November

There will be a five-day Initiatives of Change National Gathering in Talbingo, in the foothills of the Australian Alps, Thursday 8 November (dinner, meet at 7.30pm) until lunchtime Tuesday 13 November.

It will include walks with friends while enjoying the fresh country air and times to reflect on some of the deeper questions we all face, personally, in Australia and the region, to consider how we work more effectively together and the fresh things we are learning. The National Coordination Group is responsible for the agenda. If there is a topic you would like to discuss, please let us know at n cg@au.iofc.org One major point, as decided in April, is starting a process to look at the future of Armagh. People are encouraged to come for the full five days.

To book your bed at the Talbingo Mountain Retreat, please be in touch with Joyce Fraser by phoning: (02) 9559 2301 or via email: fraserjm@optusnet.com.au by 15 October.

Peter Thwaites