



Young talent dramatises the choice

On 27 November Armagh, the IofC centre in Melbourne, played host to *The Chair and the Choice* – a musical play created and spectacularly presented by 27 talented individuals. The cast and crew performed to a packed house of 100 family and friends from a variety of ages, backgrounds and walks of life.

The play explored the idea that in all of our hearts there is a source of inspiration – but following that source to be our unique self is up to each of us.

We were given a glimpse into the life of Charlie, a young man torn between following his passion and living what his friends expect of him. When his trust is broken by one of his closest friends, he tackles the idea of forgiveness and meets people who challenge his perspective on life.

As the audience watched him grapple with these choices, we learn of the wisdom within each of us which can show us how to change and how we can be the change that the world really needs. Through reflection Charlie is able to transform into someone who follows his passion, forgives and contributes to society.



*The cast of The Chair and the Choice give the opening number.
 Credit: Sashenka Lakshmanasingha*

At the end of the night the audience was left with a simple but poignant message: ‘If not me, then who? If not now, then when?’

‘I wondered why my friends had dragged me along to a play about a chair,’ said one man. ‘But then, as I got more and more into it I realised the play was about me, about all of us, and I was very glad I trusted my friends and came.’

Sashenka Lakshmanasingha, Melbourne

Indonesians trust-building in Australia

Miftahul Huda was five years old when his father put him in an Islamic boarding school in Java, Indonesia. Though he felt ‘betrayed’ and abandoned, he realizes now that his father believed in giving him the best education.

Huda, along with his wife Nenden Vinna Mutiara Ulfa and their young son, Damai, have spent two months with IofC Australia contributing to trust-building dialogues in Melbourne, Canberra and Wagga Wagga.

As he told the ABC Radio Australia Plus Indonesian, he got involved in IofC through an international team conducting a seminar at Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta in 2002. ‘At that time I often got angry about injustice and inequality in Indonesia, but I did nothing about it.’ Change, he thought, could only be achieved by government, or by politicians who hold power. ‘At the seminar I was reminded that every human being has the power to make changes... I need to light a candle inside of myself first, so that I become a torch for the community.’

Through a wide range of meetings in Australia, Huda and Nenden spoke of their work through IofC Indonesia, facilitating trust-building dialogues between Christians and Muslims, and building a network of young

people through programs on ethical leadership, family relationships and environmental sustainability (which includes picking up plastic waste and planting mangrove trees).

Soon after arrival in Australia, they met Indonesia’s Consul-General, Dewi Savitri Wahab, at a dinner at Armagh. She told them of the 51 different Indonesian community groups in Melbourne and the need for unity among such diversity. On 7 November Huda ran a trust-building workshop for a multi-faith group.

Through interacting with Indonesian academics at Monash University, Huda realised that many of those studying here become leaders when they return to Indonesia. He sees a need ‘to link their education with the big vision IofC has for the world’.

One they met, Noor Huda Ismail, is completing a PhD in Politics and International Relations at Monash while also making a documentary film to understand the process of radicalisation. On 23 November, Ismail previewed his documentary at Armagh, titled *Jihad selfie*. It follows a 16 year-old boy from Aceh who joined ISIS in Syria. Ismail invited his audience ‘to understand that the first step... is not to immediately judge and switch to the conspiracy

theory that is highly favoured by most.’ According to him we face ‘not a clash of civilisations but a clash of ignorance between people unwilling to talk’.

ABC Indonesian radio quoted Huda after the occasion: ‘I do not want to see Indonesia with the largest Muslim population in the world become a disaster as in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the countries in the Middle East. For us it is time to plant and build the spirit of Indonesia as an independent, unified, democratic, humane, prosperous, happy and peaceful nation with diversity.’ In Dandenong, they discussed these issues frankly with the Australia-Afghan Peace Initiative, which was started by a graduate of the Life Matters Workshop. The executive-director of the Islamic Council of Victoria, Nail Aykan, told them that the Muslim world is looking to Indonesia to give sound leadership.

Called to be a bridge

Huda and Nenden spoke about their relationship and work at the National Gathering of IofC Australia, mid November.

An extract from Huda:

I was born and raised in a small town in East Java. My father had a grocery shop in the traditional market. From afternoon till evening he dedicated his time to the community to teach Islam and Quran. It was a peaceful life.



Huda, Nenden and Damai at Armagh, Melbourne

When I was five years old I was sent to a pesantren, an Islamic Boarding School. They took me to the city... and I was locked in a dark room, crying loudly, banging the door. All my siblings experienced it. I felt betrayed by my father.

But he thought that the pesantren would give us the best education.

I felt unwanted and abandoned... I kept my anger inside and never showed it to my parents. I wanted to keep the peace and not to be a problem to the family.

When I came across IofC, I had this uneasy feeling towards my family, blaming them for what they did to me. Learning to listen to the story of my parents, the challenges they went through, I understood where they came from... I forgave my parents; but most importantly, I learnt how to forgive myself and find out who I really am.

I became a more grateful person and learnt from the wisdom of my father. He was a loving man, patient, hard worker, humorous and caring for the community.

In 2004, I went with an Indonesian delegation to an Asia Pacific Youth Conference in Cambodia. Surprisingly, they served us non-Halal meals. I had a difficult time to

adjust. When it came to Friday prayers, I found that the mosque was far away, in a remote area. I chose to enjoy the conference and meet good people even though they were not Muslims... It made me think about being a minority. When I got back to Indonesia, I thought, now what about my friends who are a minority in Indonesia? What about their rights for their cultures and religions?

At a National Gathering in Armagh, Nenden spoke about coming from a broken family, then after an IofC Youth Camp, starting on a road to healing and reconciling with her father before he passed away. As a teacher, she used this personal experience to improve the family relationships among her students. Now devoting her time to IofC Indonesia, she uses inner healing in family relationships for trust-building between Muslims and Christians. Just before leaving Melbourne she facilitated such a workshop for some of her countrymen.

Asked what the highlight of their visit has been, Huda says it was ‘meeting the elders in the IofC team... people with such a commitment that they inspire us as a couple about how we can look to the future and live our calling to build a peaceful life for everyone.’

In 2006, I went to Bali for a Global Healing Conference, after the bombing. Again, I was alone in that crowd as a Muslim, where young people were drinking alcohol, and men and women were mixing together. It was not an easy experience, but I kept searching for why I was meant to be there. In one discussion, people were sharing their stories of loss and their fear of Muslims. Though I was not sure about expressing my feelings, I stood up and made an apology to the young Australians for what happened. I said that I was not representing those who call themselves Muslims and did the bombing. But I was sorry that the bombing was done by some Muslims. They responded to me warmly; we were all in tears.

Ever since, I have tried to be open about my Muslim identity and to take responsibility to tell the world that Islam is misunderstood by some Muslims as well as by non-Muslims.

I have felt called, within my own capacity, to be the bridge between Muslims and non-Muslims. Indonesia can be a good model of people from different religions, tribes, languages and backgrounds, all respected by the law. As a young Indonesian, I feel grateful that my country has developed as a democracy despite its many problems and challenges. There are opportunities for change.

Through IofC, it is clear for me that everybody needs a space for being accepted for who they are. We can learn how to listen to our inner wisdom as well as to listen to other stories.

My calling is to work for interfaith dialogue, bringing young Muslims and Christians together to listen to each other so they can mutually have the desire to engage with each other. To break the prejudices and assumptions so that they become good friends and respond to the issues they are facing, collaborating for peace and positive change.

South Sudanese church leaders take a stand for unity and peace

For almost two years, the civil war in South Sudan has divided ethnic-based churches of the diaspora in Melbourne. But on 30 October, 35 pastors and priests from these conflicted communities came together in Dandenong in a demonstration of unity and prayer.

The gathering, arranged by IofC's South Sudan Australia Peace Initiative, was addressed by Tim Costello, CEO of World Vision Australia, and Matthew Neuhaus, the head of the Middle East and Africa Branch at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

'We come here with our concerns for South Sudan but also as Australian citizens,' said Rev David Bol, referring to the fragile peace cease-fire agreement. 'Can we bring change in South Sudan? No. What we need to do is to bring change in the South Sudanese communities here in Australia, to build up the trust between us.'

Tim Costello, however, challenged them: 'Your leadership here can have a great impact on your communities in South Sudan.'

Taking five examples of 'violence between brothers' in the Old Testament, Rev Costello illustrated how God didn't play favourites but in each case brought the brothers to steps of justice and healing. 'As clergy you have an awesome opportunity and responsibility to be peace-makers and to preach the gospel of non-violence. Jesus didn't say "tolerate your enemy" but to love them.'

Some of the ministers started planning right away to take the process forward.

Meanwhile, Nyok Gor and his wife Kathryn, who played a key role in bringing the clergy together, were next day on a plane to South Sudan with Mike Brown, coordinator of IofC's South Sudan Working Group. The three of them had been among the 10 Australians who spent months there in 2013 in an effort to put reconciliation on the national agenda.

During their short 'exploratory visit', the three Australians had 33 meetings with church leaders, government officials, politicians and young people. They went to explore how IofC International could



Nyok and Kathryn Gor with respected peace-maker, Bishop Paride Taban, in Juba

re-engage in the urgently needed trust-building process, during the coming 30 month period of Transitional Government. The leadership of the South Sudan Council of Churches responded warmly to their proposals for IofC programs which could give added strength to the Council's own strategic plan.

Work will now begin on drafting proposals and seeking funding to make this intervention possible, while also sustaining what has begun among the communities of the diaspora in Australia.

Mike Brown, Adelaide

IofC Australia takes a top-down, bottom-up approach

The end of year IofC National Gathering in November had a new design, new faces and a new buzz!

Saturday, the day for business, was fast paced, sharply presented. Our Executive Officer Athalia Zwartz led us through the 'Road Map' process – over the next three years involving the network around the country in discerning the future shape and direction of IofC Australia: 'what Australia needs IofC to be'. It will combine a 'top-down and bottom-up approach', doing and talking at the same time.

A steering group is already in place to design a process of data collection, discussion and decision-making (the 'talking'). While everyone else is encouraged to share what they are already doing and to try new things – using an innovative 'Next step experiments' template – in the 'doing' of IofC action and outreach.

Portfolio groups updated us on

their progress. Then the official AGM of IofC, held over in order to pass audited accounts, enabled members to give a resounding 'yes' to the official name change from 'Moral Re-Armament' to 'Initiatives of Change'.

We were energised by:

- » soon-to-be-married Mike Worsman with his fiancé, Sashenka, using photos of his 'Million Smiles' campaign decorating the house (see www.amillionsmilesmovie.com);
- » newly-married Kirtsy Argento, newly-returned from her 'Year of Living Differently' with IofC across several countries, combining spiritual growth with practical learning;
- » Assefa Bekele, multi-cultural officer with the NSW police wanting more Life Matters Workshops in Sydney's Blacktown;
- » Margaret Hepworth, educator, alive with news of Creators of Peace in Fiji.

On Sunday, the 'fellowship' day, after quiet reflection and sharing conversation, everyone was spread around the house and garden engaged in a workshop of their choice – from water-colour techniques to 'performance review' using Dynamic Governance principles.

At the end of the afternoon others from around Melbourne gathered to hear from Indonesian guests, Miftahul Huda and Nenden Ulfa, speaking with humour, sensitivity and conviction about their two months working with IofC Australia (see page opposite).

We were reminded that 'the success of loving', according to Mother Theresa, is 'in the loving – not in the result of the loving'. And from a sometimes-breathless, sometimes-still, entirely-useful National Gathering, we are encouraged to proceed with 'the doing'.

Jean Brown, Adelaide

Note: full reports of the National Gathering are available from ncc@au.iofc.org

Creators of Peace in Fiji

In a trans-Tasman partnership, Sue Sinclair from New Zealand with Lesley Bryant and Margaret Hepworth from Australia, were in Fiji 16-27 October to extend the outreach of the Creators of Peace program. Well-known social activists, Suliana Siwatibau and Priscilla Singh, were involved in planning the two Peace Circles in which 15 women took part.



Lesley, Sue and Margaret in Fiji

Ratu (Chief) Meli Vesikulu opened the first Circle, speaking about the importance of women working to bring peace where it is needed at the community level. Again, in the final session, he spoke passionately of the need for Fiji to find a path towards peace.

Apart from one Indo-Fijian, all the women were Fijian or Fiji Melanesian. Singing was offered to bring both healing and joy. Each day they sang at the lighting of the candle. After a particularly emotional story or quiet moment, they sang for the person who had shared, bringing a depth of connectedness.

Having learned new skills and shared significant personal changes, we each left feeling part of a group of people able to encourage each other in this transforming process towards a vision for peace in Fiji. 'I'm learning to practice really listening,' said one participant. 'I've been really good at pretending to listen!'

'We must break the culture of silence,' said another, as in not

speaking out to confront injustice. A particularly poignant session examined the root causes of domestic violence and how to move forward through the practice of peace in such circumstances.

The visitors were also invited to a remote inland village, Nawairuku, two hours north of Suva in Ra province. Having been unable to take the time from work to participate in a Circle, Kalara Une the deputy head teacher at the local school, and her husband Une, hosted us in their home for three nights. While in the village Margaret ran two Global Citizenship/Peace Building workshops for the students at a primary school.

Funds for the facilitators' travel were donated from New Zealand and Australia, and by the facilitators themselves, while all hospitality was generously provided by their hosts.

and in Sydney...

Meanwhile in Sydney, three Creators of Peace Circles have been run over October and November – in the Inner West, Bardwell Park and in the North – each with a mix of faith groups and countries of birth. Each circle had a combination of experienced and new facilitators.

Trish McDonald-Harrison reports that the Auburn Creators of Peace network continues to meet monthly at the Auburn City Council building where the sign in the foyer is in six languages. From the Steering Committee around the table, aged twenties to seventies, 'possibilities come tumbling out: ways to learn from and serve this community of over 125 cultures. Future plans are unfolding, including designing child-inclusive events. "In this area, women and children are inseparable," says Saada from Somalia. We're excited.'

Life Matters Workshop on offer in Melbourne

'Would you like to make a positive difference to issues that concern you in your family and community?'

What does it take to begin to be a change-maker and community builder?'

With these probing questions, the team planning the 2016 Life Matters Workshop in Melbourne invites applicants between 18-35 to a live-in workshop at Armagh, from 22-25 January.

Enquiries and registration before 12 January with elisse.higginbotham@au.iofc.org or rob.wood@iofc.org

Australia's 'Journey of Healing' continues in UK

In London John Bond, OAM, was invited on Wednesday 18 November to speak at Australia House, the official High Commission in London, about National Sorry Day and the Journey of Healing.

In the audience were 15 Aboriginal Australians who are either currently studying at Oxford or considering Oxford or Cambridge.

Back in Oxford, where he now lives, John was invited to tea with the group. One of them wrote John thanking him for 'being someone who is willing to fight for the fundamental rights of people to have both dignity and security in their lives'.

See also the Initiatives of Change Australia website: www.au.iofc.org Facebook page: [Initiatives of Change Australia](https://www.facebook.com/InitiativesofChangeAustralia)

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