



Andrew Flynn tells his story with the cast of *The Chair and the Choice*. Credit: James Cordiner

‘A level of honesty that challenged my community’

A real buzz was in the air among the cast, musicians and technical crew as they gave two further performances of the multi-media production, *The Chair and the Choice*, before 80-90 people each evening at Armagh, the lofC centre in Melbourne, during September.

The 30 taking part in the production came from a rich tapestry of cultural backgrounds including a Vietnamese boat person now in business, an NGO intern, and Indonesian family of musicians, and several from the Islamic community. For many it was their first stage experience but they delivered it with professionalism and spirit.

Among the guests were the Federal Member for Bruce, Julian Hill, and the Mayor of Greater Dandenong, Cllr Heang Tak.

‘The play fed my soul,’ commented one of the audience. ‘It had a level of honesty that challenged the two-facedness I find in my community,’ said another.

The Chair and the Choice was written by some of those who were part of a Life Matters Workshop last year. They wanted to pass on their experiences of discovering a way forward through taking time in silence to make important choices in challenging situations. The production wove together several real life stories of attitudes transformed, horizons enlarged and making decisions guided by an inner wisdom.

One such story came from Andrew Flynn who, at the end of the performance, told how he had done a Life Matters Course just as he was graduating from university: ‘Man was that great timing. On one hand I had been accepted to

do a Masters degree which would lead onto a guaranteed profession in the health industry... with good financial incentives and a stable lifestyle.

‘On the other hand, I had also been accepted for a placement with the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development program. It was a knowledge-sharing volunteer program, run by the government, to capacity-build organisations in the Asia-Pacific region to reach the Millennium Development Goals.

‘Looking back now, I am glad that I found space to reflect on who I wanted to be... It was the “quiet time” that allowed me to filter all the advice and habitual influences that were directing me. My decision to put the Masters on hold and travel to Samoa was a tough but rewarding one. A one-year contract turned into five years, during which I worked with communities breaking down barriers to bring gender and disability equality, promoting health and safe life-styles, and sharing my knowledge with those with no access to formal education.

This experience has taken me on a journey from the offices of prime ministers to the thatched-roofed houses of humble villages with no electricity or running water, from company boardrooms to powerhouse NGOs.

In a sliding-doors moment, it was reflection in my quiet time that gave me the clear insight and opened me to these amazing opportunities. As a friend working with the United Nations shared with me in Samoa: ‘You don’t need to be extraordinary to make a difference. Just do what you can when you can.’



Australians, Fijians and New Zealanders at the Living Peace conference in Caux

Women 'telling a new story'

As she lay critically injured from the suicide-bomber's blast, life hanging in the balance, Gill Hicks made a choice. Death was an alluring, welcoming voice. But Gill chose to survive. 'It was like signing a new contract: life with a purpose.' Over months of recovery, with both of her legs blown off during that London Underground bombing 11 years ago, Gill's choice formed into a resolve 'to do the hard work of peace, to match the passion of the extremists'. And she has (see www.gilltalks.com).

Gill, who lives in Adelaide, was a keynote speaker at the 'Living Peace' conference of 200 women in Caux, Switzerland, 4-11 August – one of 22 Australians who participated. The conference was planned over two years from Australia, connecting with teams across the globe.

Celebrating 25 years of Creators of Peace, the women from 43 nations all had stories to tell – and many had made courageous choices like Gill's: turning points in the midst of Syria's war, in ethnic conflicts in Kenya, with women coming out of prostitution in Colombia, in responding to hatreds in Northern Ireland. The 'Living Peace' conference set out 'to tell a new story'. Read more about it at <http://www.iofc.org/creators-of-peace>

Newsbriefs asked two Australians to give a glimpse of their experiences in Caux:

Suzanne Marks' professional career is in human rights, equal opportunity and work-based conflict resolution, and is a member of the Sydney University Council for Peace and Conflict Studies.

Rounding a bend on the mountain railway track to Caux I had my first memorable view of the astoundingly beautiful Caux Palace Hotel. My second was the glorious scene from my room of Lake Geneva, glowing in the late afternoon sun. 'Wow,' I thought, 'I really have come to heaven.' I was right but for reasons far deeper than the view.

The next six days were transformative. In Caux's safety and sanctity I joined 200 people as we listened, worked, sang, ate, laughed, wept and sat in contemplative silence, exploring stories and new paths to peace.

We bore witness to the pain and grief of those living in countries of terrible conflict. I held hands with a beautiful woman from a war-torn country as tears flowed down her face on hearing yet more terrible news from home. Another amazing woman faces danger daily because of her work bringing education to girls. And another whose dream of creating a health train has not only brought treatment

to thousands in the poorest regions of South Africa, but inspired a young woman from another African country to achieve the same.

Caux showed me the face and heart of courage, love and unrelenting resilience of people determined to exercise their right to live in peace, to grow and flourish as individuals and communities. As a Creator of Peace it is my intention to walk this path with them in whatever way I can.

Zohra Aly from western Sydney is the national coordinator of Creators of Peace:

The first thing I noticed in Caux was the sense of community fostered by everyone contributing to running it, whether chopping vegetables, serving diners or clearing up after them with a smile. Back home in Annangrove, my family and I run an Islamic Centre with a group of hardworking volunteers. A light-bulb moment for me was to replicate this communal roster of jobs around our Saturday school with shared meals to create a feeling of inclusivity amongst those from mixed ethnic backgrounds.

Our challenge in Caux was to find ways to translate 'Living Peace' into our lives, using the speakers and workshops as inspiration.

Among the many gems I gleaned was when Lina and Marie from Lebanon, one Christian and one Muslim, told how they bring their compatriots together across the religious divides. They recognise the similarities but also accept their differences. Lina explained that diversity was a choice of God's. I will be using this simple revelation in the interfaith work that I do. Instead of only looking for common ground, I will acknowledge our differences and validate them. That's what makes us who we are!

Coming to Caux was a pilgrimage of sorts. The process of teasing out the jumbled strands of thoughts gave new meaning to family issues that I carried since childhood. A meeting with cousins on the train at Montreux led to wonderful family time.

Caux is an experience that is still unfolding for me.

IofC New Zealand receives a Harmony Award

At the launch of Islam Awareness Week last month, IofC NZ was presented with the annual Harmony Award by the Federation of Islamic Associations in NZ (FIANZ). Sultan Eusoff, as CEO of FIANZ, said it was 'in recognition of (IofC's) dedication and sincerity to create sustainable peace and harmony in our lives and our surroundings by connecting people of all religions, races and cultures'.

Chaired by the Saudi Arabian Ambassador, those attending included the Mayor of Wellington, Muslim, Jewish and Christian clergy, diplomats, local councillors and representatives from Police and the Department of Ethnic Affairs.

IofC's interaction with the Muslim community has grown over recent years, primarily through Sultan and his wife, Alimah. Following the visit of IofC International president Omnia Marzouk in 2015, he arranged a showing of *The Imam and the Pastor* for members of the Wellington Abrahamic Council, of which he is Muslim co-chair. Muslim women have taken part in Creators of Peace Circles, with one attending the Living Peace conference in Caux.

IofCNZ and FIANZ jointly sponsored Khadar Abdulaziz to represent NZ at the Asia-Pacific Youth Conference in Bandung in August. 'The trip was the best thing I have

done in my life time,' wrote Khadar afterwards. Growing up in Somalia, he found it challenged him towards 'healing and moving on, not holding on to the past that was slowly killing me inside'.

'The quiet time was the best, though I found it tough, testing, painful and difficult. Letting the emotions come out, the sadness, happiness, anger, rage, joy and love. Listening to your head, heart, and writing down the ideas... Finally, reading it again to remember.'



At the award ceremony (from front left): President of FIANZ Hazim Arafah, Saudi Ambassador Al-Johani and Mayor Celia Wade-Brown. Sultan Eusoff is standing centre.

Three lives which made a difference

Three Australians passed away in recent months, each having contributed to changing the world around them.

John Farquharson was a young journalist when he and his house mates in Canberra met Frank Buchman in 1956. Buchman, the initiator of Moral Re-Armament (now IofC), came to their modest home repeatedly during his visit, helping those four young men find faith and purpose. Those encounters impacted Farquharson all his life.

From 1965 he was editor of the *South Pacific Post* during Papua New Guinea's decade leading up to independence. Returning to Canberra he became deputy editor of *The Canberra Times*.

'A truly outstanding and distinguished journalist whom I have admired and respected over half a century,' wrote Tony Eggleton, press secretary to three Australian prime ministers. 'A fine writer and a good friend.'

Prof Dr David Allbrook had a career which was varied as it was distinguished. Over decades in Africa he was dean of medicine at the University of East Africa, worked with palaeontologist Louis Leakey to unearth a 20-million-year-old skeleton of a gorilla, and assisted relief efforts during famine in Ethiopia. At the University of Western Australia from 1965, he built the anatomy department into a world leader in research. For many years he was national president of Amnesty International. Retiring from the University as professor emeritus in 1987, he immersed himself in developing a national system of palliative care.

'A man of compassion, energy and character, David had the capacity to make friends wherever he went,' said one of his sons. 'With a strong sense of self and a powerful Christian faith, shyness, boredom and orthodoxy were not terms that featured in his personal lexicon.'

Liz Brumer, who described herself as a Jewish pastoral care worker, came across IofC late in life. Her four grandparents had all perished in the Nazi holocaust. A poignant tribute to her, published on the ABC website, was written by a Muslim Yemeni PhD student at Melbourne University.

Kamilia Al-Eriani admits it wasn't easy when she first moved into Liz's home. 'I found her personal questions intrusive. I noticed her discomfort *vis-a-vis* my views on current affairs in the Middle East and Islam.' As Yemen slid into civil war, Kamilia began to open up about her fears and fragility. 'The kitchen became the space where we shared our stories... Gradually, I came to know the real Liz – a person dedicated to life, love and laughter. What I initially took as "intrusive" was in fact Liz's yearning for human connection.'

'During Ramadan in 2015,' wrote Kamilia, 'she greeted me at every sunset with, "Ramadan Mubarak." Likewise, with Liz and her friends, I celebrated *Shabbat*, *Rosh Hashanah* and *Pesach*. Liz taught me how to make *matzo* chicken soup. She reluctantly admitted that mine was better than hers... Liz was active in community initiatives for peace and justice. Once she remarked: "If you and I can live together, love and care for each other, then the whole world can, provided people work harder to make it happen."'

From 11-13 November, at Collaroy on Sydney's northern coastline, IofC Australia is bringing together a core group of people who are willing to work for and advance its outreach, effectiveness and essential message. In preparation, two readers share perspectives:

Three motivations for inspired action

Today, our crises – ethical, cultural, ecological, economic and political – have all become so pressing that we sorely need radical new thinking, engaged leadership and committed action.

Many in our network are asking themselves what is required for IofC Australia to step into its potential role in our country and region? What 'capacity' do we need? What is it that we should be doing now?

Fundamental to finding that is to explore what was it that fuelled MRA /Initiatives of Change in the past? What were the motivations? And can we use the same today?

In my view, three motivations can still be powerful fountains for inspired action:

Cultivating a moving moral force

Faced with environmental degradation, the breakdown of societal and religious structures, financial crises and corruption, forming an inner moral vision and taking a moral/ethical

stand are necessary for any change-agent to not only 'survive' but make a difference in the world.

Leadership that steps forward to meet challenges

Leadership is not just required on the national or international stage. It is not the domain of some special individuals but the result of the actions that each one of us take on a personal level, for our families, communities and society. It is about a vision, a future that one is out to create. Leaders are ordinary people, who dare to step forward into something that is bigger than their immediate personal interests, attracted by the potential of what can open up through vision applied in action.

Expanding partnerships

When we move from asking ourselves, 'How can we be agents of change?' to actually engaging in action for change, then miracles start happening. Resources we didn't know we had start popping up around us,

people cross our paths providing the very partnerships we need to move forward. We are not alone in wanting a better world. There is magic in commitment that expands into partnerships.

Personally I find that, for the sanity of my own life and support for my own commitments, there's something which is as crucial and fundamental as breathing – praying more deeply, meditating with increased dedication, studying uplifting works of religious traditions, and doing the inner work of transformation in my intimate relationships.

Life can be magical in its contribution to the world around us, despite the many breakdowns we are facing. Taking initiatives can make a difference to others and to the communities we belong to.

If you want to be part of this search, then join us in November to explore our 'calling' and next steps.

Paul Ntoumos, member of the IofC Australia's Council of Management:

An 'App' to tap into

One factor contributing to the complexity in our world is our need to work at the speed of thought, across continents. We now work with an ever-shrinking time gap between our discussions and our decisions. Today, a week is a long time.

Paradoxically, a common complaint is that decisions are made too slowly! Information is moving so fast, it gets out-of-date before we can digest its contents. This 'information-overload' demands more rapid decisions, in order to keep up with new information.

In this new world of meta-information, we in IofC are also finding ourselves in a continuous

cycle of consultations and discussions across continents, followed by the need to speedily deliver decisions on a range of issues. This race against time is becoming a measure of our work.

What value are we adding to this information flow? We use tools like Google docs, Sharepoint, Dropbox and social media networks. But do we have time for discernment?

At the very core of Initiatives of Change, there is a simple and very powerful tool that enables us to go into our own universe within. It is that time of **intentional silence**. I call it my 'Quiet Time App'.

It is a process of going inwards in order to go outwards. It is where

true discernment is born. Where the intellect and intuition merge. Where emotions are calmed. It is where I can balance the 'information overload' with an 'inspiration download'.

I need to stop and use my 'Quiet Time App' at various points in the day. It brings me direction, focus and provides an inner compass when I have to process more information and make more decisions in less and less time.

This 'App' is free. And I don't need my smart phone to access it!

*Mohan Bhagwandas,
Vice President, IofC International*

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