

President's Report

Auckland Inter-Faith Council (AIFC)

Annual General Meeting

12 August 2021

The Executive Committee 2020-2021:-

Officers: President - Ruth Cleaver (Unificationist); Vice President- Harpreet Singh Kohli (Sikh); Treasurer - Steve Drake (Bahá'í); Secretary – Amy Marsden; Committee Members: Beate Matthies- (Roman Catholic); Ram Lingam (Hindu Dharma); Daud Azimullah (Muslim); Muriel Samuela (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints); Paul Wilton (Jewish); Caitlin Bush (Buddhist); Rev. Ivica Gregurec (Anglican).

Seconded by the Committee to assist: Rev Marama Diane Winder (Interspiritual); Naomi Johnson (Jewish); Anne Degia-Pala (Muslim), Aadil Basha (Muslim).

News about our members: Anne Pala & Tayyaba Khan, both AIFC Advisors, were accepted to be part of an international panel of interfaith experts (60 from around the world) in a programme organised and sponsored by the European Union called GERIS (Global Exchange on Religion in Society) which over 2 years will explore interfaith and diversity programmes in various countries. It will involve Zoom meetings and international travel.

In other news, Steve Drake has been in and around Haifa, Israel for 3 months managing a building project for the international Bahá'í community which will be a landmark architectural feat; Harpreet managed to safely go and come back from India to attend the wedding of his son; Amy has just had a baby, and Asenahana Tuakalau (Sena) has joined us as a Secretary while Amy is on 'maternity leave'; Rev Marama Diane Winder was accredited as a doula (assists people in the process of death and dying).

EVENTS:

EXPLORING SACRED SPACES:

- Annual programme, initiated in November 2017 by AIFC to be a 'flagship' project.
- Visits included a tour of the facility organised by the local faith group, brief explanation about the faith and worship practices
- In spite of challenges with lockdowns and covid uncertainty, we staged 4 visits as part of the Auckland Heritage Festival:-
- Bharatiya Mandir Hindu Temple, 252 Balmoral Road, on Sat. 3 Oct.
- Ponsonby Mosque, 17 Vermont St, on Sun. 4 Oct.
- Catholic Cathedral of St Patrick & St Joseph, Wyndham St., Wed. 7 Oct.
- Anglican Holy Trinity Cathedral, Parnell, Sun. 11 Oct.
- Turnout averaged around 30 people per visit, which allowed for Q&A and good engagement between presenters and audience.

OTHER PROGRAMMES:

- **Leadership Diversity Day:** Youth programme done in collaboration with RDC (Religious Diversity Centre) and the Unitec Chaplaincy (Ricky Waters), financially supported by Astor Foundation. Year

12 students from state, special character, and private schools are brought together to experience interfaith dialogue and learn about leadership in a religiously and culturally diverse society. Takes place on the tertiary Maraes (Unitec for Centre/West schools and MIT for East/South schools). Full day programme includes an introduction to Maori spirituality, peer presentations from various faith perspectives on topical issues followed by group discussions. Lunch and morning tea were provided. In total 12 schools participated.

- **“Faith Perspectives on Preserving Our Environment”** – on 30th June, at Avondale Islamic Centre. Excellent presentations from members of the Committee; 35 people attended.
- **Week of Prayer for World Peace**- an original flyer with prayers from many faiths was created by Secretary Amy and distributed.

NETWORKING & SUBMISSIONS:

- Ruth was invited and able to attend the State Opening of 53rd Parliament in Wellington at the invitation of the Office of the Prime Minister on 26 Nov. Several other ‘prestigious’ invitations to Wellington events have also been received (from Min. Priyanca Radhakrishnan re Youth, and general invitation to the ceremony honouring the late Prince Philip). Encouraging to see the recognition of interfaith in these circles.
- Several Committee members attended hui re Royal Commission of Inquiry and made submissions to OEC re how they could better support the “interfaith sector”.
- Submission made on behalf of AIFC (drafted by Rev Marama Diane Winder) to the Public Service Commission in response to their call for feedback as to the Government’s National Action Plan to make government more transparent.
- Connecting with Office of Ethnic Communities – Bernard Gomes, Senior Diversity & Engagement Advisor is available for consultation and support of interfaith and faith communities. Ruth attended the Auckland welcome of Mervin Singham as Chief Executive of the new Ministry of Ethnic Communities established 1 July.
- Small interfaith focus group was created at the request of Ministry of Justice and met with government policy developers (from Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Development, & Department of Internal Affairs). Issues were social cohesion and response to government proposals re Royal Commission of Inquiry around ‘hate speech’.
- Supported work of Dr Juliet Chevalier-Watts, Senior Lecturer from University of Waikato Faculty of Law. She is doing a research project that looks to evaluate the financial value of religious charities in the NZ charity sector.
- Paul and Naomi attended a workshop organised by NZ Police about hate speech.
- AIFC members attended a number of events including Iftar dinners (invited by NZMA and Pearl of the Islands); and as President Ruth was invited to attend the Passover Seder at Beth Shalom and the Women’s Peace Symposium of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women’s Association

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

- We acknowledge and are very grateful for the voluntary work done by Committee Members, Advisors, and other volunteers to keep AIFC running and make all of these initiatives happen. Special thanks to Beate and Marama for updating the AIFC website.
 - We thank ADCOSS – Auckland District Council of Social Services (through Beate) for donating to us a speaker system to use at meetings.
 - We appreciate all AIFC ‘financial’ members (paying the annual subscription of \$20.)- these funds keep our programmes going.
 - We continue to be very appreciative of the generous support of Mr Stephen Dil and Dil’s Funerals for providing printing and graphic design work, and to our photographer Mr Barry Noel who volunteers his services to help us record and document our events.
 - We thank the Astor Foundation for financial support of the Leadership Diversity Day programmes.
 - We would also like to acknowledge our hosts for the evening, the Family Federation for World Peace, also known as the Heavenly Parents Holy Community, for the use of this facility tonight and for our ongoing Committee meetings.
 - Many thanks to everyone participating this evening and to all who have supported our work over the last year.
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