

By: Surendra Prasad. Queensland Chapter, Hindu Council of Australia.

Queensland Faith Communities Council General Meeting was held on Thursday 20 June, 2019.

There was a very positive response to the General Council meeting and attendees were particularly interested in hearing from the three speakers about interfaith projects taking place in south-east Queensland.

I am also delighted to report on another very successful **QFCC Women of Faith Dinner** held last night at Upper Mount Gravatt. Attendance almost doubled last year, with close to 90 women present from around 16 different faith communities. Helen Paget from the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane and Janeth Deen from the Islamic Council of Qld spoke about how their faith impacts their lives. It was a wonderful night of conversation and making new friends. Special thanks go to the women on the Executive and their friends who did an amazing catering job!

What's happening around South East Queensland:

- Multi-Faith Advisory and Action Group (MAAG) Gold Coast Rev'd Bryan Gilmour, from the Uniting Church in the southern area of the Gold Coast, spoke about the establishment of this group. It was formed as a response to the negative community reactions to plans for building a mosque in the area in 2015. The importance of educating the local community about different faith groups and the need for growing understanding and respect was the primary driver.
- There are now nine faith groups involved. An early project was to work with the Chairperson of the Principals Association on the Gold Coast. Eight senior students from each High School were asked to respond to the following: What can we do at our schools to be compassionate? (Bullying was considered a significant issue) What would we recommend to the Gold Coast City Council as means of building a more compassionate community? The local Mayor has been responsive to the students and GCCC has taken leadership in this area.
- Compassionate Gold Coast Terry Ayling, facilitator of Compassionate Gold Coast spoke to a presentation he had made at the Parliament of World Religions in Toronto in 2018. He works closely with MAAG and is doing strategic work with young people in the areas of education and health. There are significant social issues on the Gold Coast: There is a major problem with needle use especially for taking steroids; there are 70 cases of Domestic Violence before Southport Court every day.
- The Compassionate Cities Program is an international project. The aspiration is that by 2021, Australia will be recognised as a Compassionate Nation. The Gold Coast is one of the first cities on board, along with Ballarat in Victoria. The GCCC has appointed one of the Councillors to be a liaison with CGC Quotes: Anyone of a religious group using violence is misinterpreting their religion (Hugh McKay) SEE Learning: Social, Emotional, Ethical Learning (Dalai Lama) Terry invites QFCC and members to partner with Compassionate

Gold Coast Contact details are: terry.ayling@compassionategoldcoast.org.au

- Together for Humanity Ronit Baras, Queensland State Director of Together for Humanity, explained that the program began in response to the 9/11 attacks as the Goodness and Kindness Program. It works in Australian schools to foster interfaith and intercultural understanding and so brings communities together. While it is open to all faiths, its presenters are generally from Jewish, Muslim and Christian backgrounds. They work as teams either directly with students or doing professional development with teachers. Many students have never met someone from another faith and so the face-to-face approach, where people can build personal relationships with one another, works best and changing attitudes can happen quickly. They have also worked with QPS Police liaison officers. Contact details: ronit@togetherforhumanity.org.au Also see flyer attached to these Minutes.
 - Youth Parliament of World Religions, Sydney (YouTube Clip) Margaret Naylor had planned to show a YouTube clip explaining this event, which has been running in Sydney for the last three years or so, but unfortunately we lost our internet connection.
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=254042631902085> This is a very inspiring gathering organised by young people for young people. There is potential that QFCC could run something similar in the future.
10. Opportunity for discussion in small groups and questions Members were encouraged to find someone that they had not met before or whom they didn't know well and discuss something that had been a highlight for them in the evening's presentation. They were also invited to feedback anything to the QFCC Executive.

Religious Freedom:

- Religious Freedom is a topic that is current in the wider world and of course is of great relevance to all of us.
- A full day legal seminar "Religious Freedom after Ruddock" was held by the School of Law at the University of Queensland on 6 April and was attended by Heather Griffin and David and Jonathon Paratz. David provided a short, written report to the QFCC Executive and Heather reported back to our May meeting.
- Basically it was felt that there is no real threat to freedom of worship but it is worthy of note that there were a significant number of submissions to the Ruddock inquiry - 15,500. Patrick Parkinson of UQ noted in his presentation a 'hostility to people of faith' e.g. that there was a 59% rise in anti-Semitic incidents in Australia in 2018 and that typically it was religious venues that were attacked. There was general agreement at the seminar that the Ruddock Inquiry did not deal with the real issues and that it was seen as an exercise to calm debate.
- Importantly, the Law Reform Commission has recently been asked to report into religious freedom and this is where the greater significance may come.

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