

Interfaith Journey – Wellington Way

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Brief History

- Started as an informal group around 1988
- Some members were actively involved in World Conference of Religion & Peace (WCRP)
- 1990-92 started to work with WN City Council to celebrate Faith & Community Week
- 1995-96 negotiated an interfaith ceremony as part of the Commonwealth Day celebrations



Brief History- contd.

- 1990 onwards involved in World Week of Prayer for World Peace (WPWP)
- 1997 onwards community based interfaith activities increased and interest for interfaith activities evident in other regions as well
- Since 9/11 a Rapid Response Group became active and has successfully kept the 'outside' conflict 'out of our community' specially in WN region



Brief History – contd.

- 2002 a decision was made to organise the first National Interfaith Forum with encouragement from the Government
- 2003 a highly successful first National Interfaith Forum was organised
- Since then the group has become more formal in its operation and currently meets on a monthly basis



First National Interfaith Forum

- Key aim/vision of WN Interfaith Group is to enhance and encourage peace and harmony in the community through interfaith dialogue and understanding of other faith groups
- This aim/vision was reinforced at the first national forum in 2003



2003 Forum

- All participants were asked three key questions and participants were divided into small groups to discuss their response to each question.
- Out of that discussion key points/recommendations were collated



Three key questions

- How do you go about encouraging interfaith dialogue?
- What will be our legacy to young people? What do we really want to leave behind?
- Does your faith in particular and 'religion' in general has a role to play? What will that role be?



***Some responses to these
three questions:***



How do you go about encouraging interfaith dialogue?

- Identify/strengthen core interfaith groups
- Establish spiritual discovery/discussion groups
- Visits to schools by multifaith delegation/s
- Steering committee – annual topic on social issues
- Encouraging faith communities to have dialogues on human rights and UN charter
- Involve children and young people



What will be our legacy to young people?
What do we really want to leave behind?

- Structures that can promote understanding & ensure continuity of interfaith dialogue
- Respect for others who are different
- To move beyond tolerance
- Young people sharing cultural activities together through educational institutions, faith communities and community festivals



Does your faith in particular and 'religion' in general has a role to play? What will that role be?

- By 2013 establish a faith centre that will host parliament/parliamentarians
- Enlighten mainstream media
- Self-examination of our own tradition/s
- Separate cultural element from religion
- Develop NZ version of religion/spirituality
- Develop universal consciousness
- Christianity as a dominant faith to make/create space for minority faith groups



In essence, what did we really want?

- Peace, harmony and acceptance
- Inform ourselves and others
- Broaden our horizons and open up
- Derive strength from our diversity
- Develop inclusive structures and processes that empower all, regardless of faith, culture and ethnicity



Latest developments in WN

- Move from semi-formal structure to more formal structure
- Formal constitution
- Formal election of committee members
- Certain amount of despondency in minor faith groups



Interfaith tradition – National Scene

- Various individuals and organisations involved for the past 20-25 years
- Formation of various Interfaith Councils in the country
- First National Interfaith Forum – 2003 with encouragement from the government
- First National Interfaith Women Forum -2005



Interfaith tradition – National Scene

- First National Interfaith Youth Forum – 2008
- Active interfaith groups now in both islands
- Considerable amount of resource material being prepared by various individuals



Involvement of government agencies

- NZ Police produced interfaith resource book for their staff
- NZ Police, Office of the Ethnic Affairs, Ministry of Social Development, Families Commission and Human Rights Commission- regular participants in interfaith seminars/conferences
- Involvement of local bodies/city councils



Involvement of government agencies- contd.

- National Diversity forum organised by the Human Rights Commission
- Active participation in Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue – NZ one of the four sponsors along with Australia
- Hosted one of these forum in NZ in 2007
- Human Rights Commission provided leadership & support to the development of Statement of Religious Diversity



Census figures – 2001 & 2006

Religion/faith	2001	2006
Catholic	484,821	507,771
Anglican	584,793	554,925
Hindus	39,867	64,557
Sikhs	5,199	9,507
Muslims	23,634	36,150
Buddhists	41,661	52,392
No religion	1,028,052	1,297,104 (37%)



So what were the challenges along the way.....

- Informal vs formal structure
- Who should be part of the structure – which faith/s
- Funding for ongoing activities
- Organisational goals vs personal aspirations
- People with hidden agendas – using the group for personal gains



Challenges – contd.

- Long-term/ sustainable energy
- Involving and energising new people into the group
- Interfaith vs. Intra-faith
- Intra-faith dialogue is more challenging
- Gender balance in membership and leadership
- Need for national network for long term sustainability
- Risk of being captured by interest groups
- Balance between 'grass root' and 'academic' interests and membership

