



The Interfaith Network – City of Greater Dandenong
IFN Members Meeting
December 4th, 2024
12.00 – 3.00 pm
Draft Meeting Minutes
Training Room,
Level 1, 39 Clow Street, Dandenong

Item Number	Agenda Item	Discussion Lead	Decision Outcome
1	Present	Agnes Kean Anita Davine Venerable Then Sen Zoe Canaider Iman Abdurrahman Sahin Mehtap Williams Venerable Bodhicitta Tina Malado Chit Min Thu Pannasobhana Thero Matsya Devi Dasi Ursula Armua Mr Jasbir Singh Suropada Livia Carusi Paris Sard Lilian Poke	
1.1	Apologies	Kathy Kaplan Loreto Cannon Paster peter Demuth Venerable Oi Sam Len Shaiwatanatorn Venerable Thick Thien Tam Muallim Umar Venerable Gnanawimala Bandaraulaptha Thero Mr Abudlah Hamimi Imran Furkan Gisela Rankin Mevlid Osmanovic Roz Blades OAM	IFN President, Mehtap Williams, formally noted the received apologizes
1.3	Welcome	IFN President, Mehtap Williams	Mehtap Williams welcomed IFN members, staff and guests to our final Members meeting for 2024. She gave special acknowledgement to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service and commitment of IFN members within their local communities.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service and commitment of the IFN Executive Committee, staff, and volunteers over the past 12 months. • Support of IFN partners including the City of Greater Dandenong <p>She also noted several highlights for IFN over the past 12 months including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of the IFN Strategic Objectives and Priorities over the next 3 years • Revised IFN website • Launch of the IFN social media platforms • Annual Interfaith Schools Gathering involving over 400 students. • Recent Council elections, and the presentation of the Common Statement to the elected Mayor and Deputy by IFN and members. <p>She also encouraged members to put forward their ideas and topics for future IFN Members meetings via the Executive Officer, Liv Carusi, and to visit the IFN website on a regular basis as information is updated on a regular basis. She thanked all present and reiterated how grateful she was to be part of IFN and serve as IFN President.</p>
1.4	Acknowledgement of Country	IFN Vic President, Antia Davine	<p>Anita Davine led the 'Acknowledgment of Country', with the following words:</p> <p><i>'We acknowledge the Bunurong People of the Kulin Nation as Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we meet today. On behalf of the IFN, I pay our respect to the Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country. We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society and their importance</i></p>

			<i>in maintaining knowledge, traditions, and culture in our community'</i>
2.0	Opening Reflection	IFN Executive Committee Member, Association Secretary, Kathy Kaplan, read by Vice President Anita Davine	Anita Davine led the 'Opening Reflection' on behalf of Kathy Kaplan. The reflection has been included as part of the draft meeting minutes
3.0	Housekeeping	Executive Officer, Liv Carusi	Housekeeping items noted
3.1	Previous meeting minutes	Executive Officer, Liv Carusi	The minutes of the previous IFN Members Meeting were tabled and approved. Moved: Anita Davine, IFN Vice President Second: Agnes Kean Carried
4.0	Registered Apologizes		Noted above
4.1	Registered Attendees and Introductions		Meeting attendees introduced themselves.
5.0	IFN Values, Defining	IFN Education Officer and Livia Carusi	<p>5 Values have been agreed to be IFN Members. These being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harmony • Respect • Diversity • Education • Integrity <p>The first 3 Values were worked shopped, and the following wording options will be tabled with the IFN Executive Committee at the next scheduled meeting in February 2025, for review and future direction. The remaining 2 values will be workshopped with members at a future meeting.</p> <p>Suggested wording.</p> <p>Harmony – Bringing together communities in reflective dialogue for peace and prosperity for all, celebrating our differences.</p> <p>Or</p>

			<p>Harmony – Bringing together communities in reflective dialogue and understanding for peace and eternal prosperity for all, celebrating and embracing our differences.</p> <p>Respect – In interfaith, respect means appreciating and valuing the diversity of beliefs, practices, traditions, fostering mutual understanding, active listening and co-operation while rejecting prejudice and promoting peaceful co-existence.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Respect – In interfaith, respect means, when diversity is acknowledged without prejudice, embracing all, true active listening, co-operation, and collaboration to promote peace, harmony and social cohesion in the benefit of the country and welfare of the whole creation.</p> <p>Diversity – For our IFN means acknowledging and accepting all faiths, irrespective of culture, religion, gender, age, without judgment and without personal agendas.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Diversity – For our IFN means acknowledging and accepting people of all faiths, culture, religion, genders, age, and without personal agendas.</p>
	<p>Greater Dandenong Mental Health and Wellbeing Local Presentation</p>	<p>Zoe Canaider, Cross-Cultural Practice Manager</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liv Carusi thanked Zoe and her team for their attendance and presentation and offered a gift on behalf of the IFN. • Zoe will forward Livia a copy pf the presentation for circulation to IFN members

			<p>and to upload onto the IFN website.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoe shared resources from members to take with them. • Livia will upload the service information onto the IFN website, in the section called 'Seeking Assistance'.
7.0	Other Members Business	Executive Officer, Liv Carusi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IFN Harmony Week is being held on Thursday, March 20th, 2025. Flier invitation is to be circulated shortly. Contact Person is Liv Carusi, IFN Executive Officer. • IFN Places of Worship Tour Guide Information Session is being held on May 7th, 2025. Contact Person is Paris Sard, IFN Community Education Officer. • Annual Interfaith Schools Gathering 2025. Planning with the Sub Committee will commence in February 2025, Contact Person is Paris Sard. • Monash Legal Service offers free training on a range of issues including family violence. IFN is in discussion on training topics for members which will form part of the IFN Members meetings in 2025. Contact Person is Liv Carusi • Talking Faith Forum 2025 – Planning with Council will commence in February 2025. Contact Persons are, Liv Carusi and Paris Sard. • IFN Membership Contact Information Renewal Form. Members encouraged to ensure that their contact details remain updated for the IFN Membership. This form is available on the IFN website in 'Join Us' section and is also available by contacting Lilian Poke, IFN Administration Officer.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IFN City of Greater Dandenong Funding Contract. The current funding contract with Council will end in June 2025. IFN is engaged in a review process with the Council regarding future funding. Further information will be provided to members as we progress through the review process. <p>The IFN website posts information on upcoming events and other useful information.</p> <p>What's app group to be established for IFN Members meetings to serve as a reminder of the meeting, in addition to the current ways that IFN promotes Members meetings.</p> <p>Paris Sard to establish What's App Group.</p>
	Next IFN Members Meeting	Executive Officer, Liv Carusi	The next scheduled Members meeting is scheduled for May 7 th , 2025,
8.2	IFN Members Meeting – Closed	Executive Officer, Liv Carusi	The IFN Members meeting was closed with reflection.

The Wisdom of Listening: Building Bridges Through Dialogue

Prepared by Kathy Kaplan, IFN Association Secretary

Listening is a universal act that transcends cultural and religious boundaries. It is both simple and profound, requiring humility, empathy and openness. In Judaism, listening is not only valued but commanded. The *Shema*, the central prayer of the Jewish faith, begins with the word *Hear*—a call to active listening: *Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad*, *Hear, O Israel: the Lord our G-d, the Lord is One*. But this is not just a call to hear; it's a call to internalise, to understand and to act.

In a world that often prioritises speaking over listening, we need to reclaim the art of listening — not just to G-d but to one another. This is especially vital in interfaith contexts where understanding different perspectives can break down barriers and build bridges of mutual respect, understanding and trust.

In the Torah, listening is, very often, linked to action. In Exodus, when the Israelites received Torah at Mt Sinai, they said, *Na'aseh v'nishma, We will do and we will listen*.

Isn't that order interesting? It's act first then listen rather than, what I guess most of us would expect, of listen first then act. I think that this surprising order emphasises the trust inherent in listening: we commit to act before fully understanding because we trust the source.

In the Talmud, Rabbi Hanina teaches that one should strive to understand the words of another before responding. Isn't that why we have two ears and only one mouth? That teaching aligns with the concept of *dan l'kaf zechut*, of *judging others favourably*, which requires listening deeply to the other person's perspective.

The Jewish emphasis on listening extends beyond interpersonal relationships to our relationship with the Divine. The *Shema* calls us to hear G-d's unity and presence in the world — a unity that challenges us to find common ground with all of humanity, because each of us was created in G-d's image.

Listening is a cornerstone of many religious traditions. As I understand it, for Christians, James mirrors Jewish teaching when he advises (1:19) that *Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry*

For our Muslim friends, the Qu'ran emphasises the importance of listening as a form of respect and understanding. I believe, in the Surah Al-Anfal (8:2), it describes the faithful as those whose hearts tremble when they hear G-d's words.

Buddhism, as part of the Eightfold Path toward enlightenment, teaches *mindful listening*, a practice of fully attending to another without judgment and our own Australian Indigenous peoples place significant emphasis on a practice of deep listening, an almost spiritual skill, based on respect which they call *dadirri*.

The practice of *daadirri*, which includes listening to stories and absorbing the wisdom of elders, teaches that listening is essential for learning and living meaningfully. It offers lessons in humility and spiritual awareness and underscores the importance of being fully present which aligns with spiritual practises across most if not all faith traditions.

Especially now in our age of social media and constant noise, when we're conditioned to prioritise speaking, debating and stating our views, listening is harder than it seems. Active listening demands humility, empathy and patience; of recognising that we don't have all the answers, of putting ourselves in someone else's shoes and of allowing others to share their stories fully before responding.

In interfaith dialogue, these qualities are essential. Misunderstandings and stereotyping can be dismantled when we listen with open hearts.

When we listen to others deeply, we hear more than the words they say; we affirm the humanity of the speaker. We create a space where differences become less threatening and more enriching. Interfaith dialogue thrives when we listen not to argue or debate, but to understand and care.

The *Shema* teaches us that listening is not a passive act but a vibrant action of faith and connection. In interfaith contexts, listening becomes an act of unity. While our beliefs may differ and while we may worship differently, we can all honour the sacredness of hearing each other's truth.

As we proceed through this meeting and then go back to our lives, let's embrace the wisdom and practice of listening. Let's hear the voices of our neighbours, colleagues, families and friends with open hearts. By doing so, we fulfill not only the call of the *Shema* but the universal call to be better stewards of our shared world.

Together, through listening, we can build bridges that lead to greater understanding, mutual respect and, please G-d, lasting peace.

Kathy Kaplan