

## Peace, Justice and Interfaith Dialogue in Studies of Religion I & II Conference 2009



Friday 6th of March brought together teachers from all around NSW to provide them with inspiration, motivation and knowledge for the Studies of Religion subject. More specifically, the conference was for teachers of the HSC courses, Studies of Religion I and II. Its principal interest was the Studies of Religion II topic, Religion and Peace.

The focus of that syllabus topic is the distinctive response of two religious traditions to the issue of peace. HSC students study the understanding of peace expressed in sacred texts and principal teachings of two of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam; and the contributions of these two religious traditions to peace in the context of the individual's inner peace and the means of achieving world peace.

The conference was the result of an organising committee coming together on a regular basis over a period of 6 months or so. The organising committee included:

Alice Priest, Teaching Educator, Religious Education & Learning Services, Parramatta Catholic Education Office

Brian Elliott, Manager, Human Society and Its Environment Curriculum K12 Directorate, NSW Department of Education and Training

Helen Clarke, HOD Christian Studies and Social Justice, Knox Boarding Liaison Officer, Knox Grammar School

John McGrath, Head of Mission Services, Catholic Schools Office, Diocese of Broken Bay



Rev Jon Noble, Senior Teacher, MLC School, President, Association for Studies of Religion

Mehmet Ozalp, Chief Executive Officer, Affinity Intercultural Foundation

Zuleyha Keskin, Education Co-ordinator and Vice President, Affinity Intercultural Foundation

The all day conference commenced with a panel comprising of speakers from five faith traditions; Ms Mary Senj - Aboriginal, Ms Gillian Coote - Buddhist, Rev Jon Noble - Christian, Prof Raja Jayaraman - Hindu, Rabbi Zalman Kastel - Jewish, Mrs Zuleyha Keskin - Muslim. The panel was facilitated by the well known interfaith minister and author Rev Dr Stephanie Dowrick. Based on the feedback, the panel was the best part of the conference; listening to speakers from five faith traditions about peace was seen to be a unique opportunity.

Nevertheless, the workshops were also greatly appreciated and discussion in the workshops demonstrated the desire of these passionate teachers to better understand the topics being discussed.



All workshops were almost equally popular with a great array of speakers for each workshop. Session 1 had the following workshops;

Sacred Text and Practice, Validation of Peace & Violence by the followers of the faith traditions.

Jewish Speaker: Rabbi Paul Jacobson, Christian Speaker: Dr William Emilsen, Muslim Speaker: Mr Mehmet Ozalp

How the Abrahamic faiths guide the individual to achieving inner peace.

Jewish Speaker: Rabbi Jeffrey Cohen, Christian Speaker: Dr Matthew Del Nevo,

Muslim Speaker: Ms Makiz Ansari

Religion and Non Religion, Religious Expression and Non Religious Worldviews as a means of achieving inner and world peace.

Rev Jon Noble and Dr Chris Hartney

Session 2 had the following workshops;

Repeat of "Sacred Text and Practice, Validation of Peace & Violence by the followers of the faith traditions".

Multimedia, choosing and sharing resources. A look at



Programming for Religion and Peace with activities and resources.

Speaker: Ms Helen Smith

The Values Exchange - a multi media approach; different Religious Traditions perspectives through ethical case studies; environment and bioethics as contribution to world peace.

Speaker: Mr Andrew Weeding

Overall, the conference had a positive buzz to it, teachers networking, sharing their knowledge and experiences and seeking new ways to teach their students such an important subject in the real world.

One teacher from Dubbo said "I would like to thank you for your fantastic in-service that was on Friday. I found it very inspirational and worthwhile."

Another teacher commented, "Not only was the conference educational but it was also spiritually uplifting."

And a common question that was asked by many was "When is the next one?"

