

CCCMR Report to the Region of Oceania

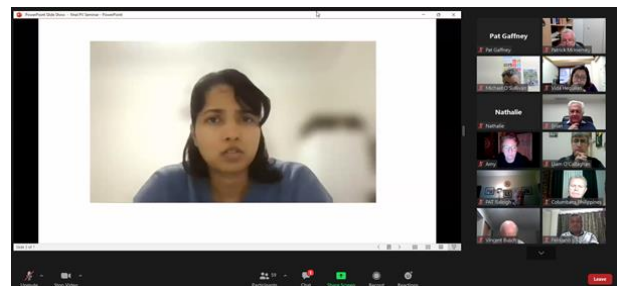
2 March 2022

Introduction

We began today's Centre meeting with the Eucharist for Ash Wednesday and blessed each other with ashes. We prayed for peace in Ukraine, for an end to the coronavirus pandemic, and God's blessing for our benefactors and for our and your missionary works. Below are highlights from activities presented at our meeting.

IRD Interfaith Harmony Week Webinar, by Sam Cherian

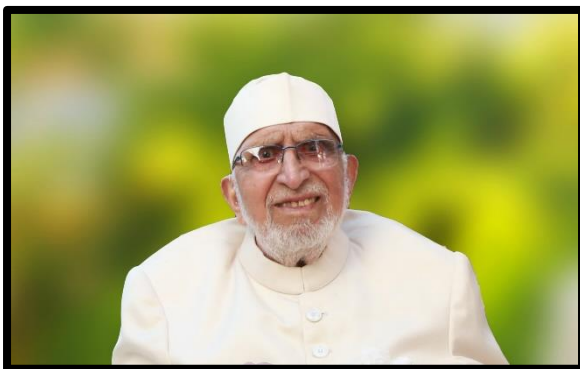
On 1 February the JPIC-IRD Columban Networks co-hosted a webinar for interfaith harmony week on Peace and Non-violence. Three individuals were invited to speak from all over the world. Sam Cherian from CCCMR presented on *The Sydney Statement* as a model for inter-religious dialogue. She spoke about her personal experiences regarding religious-based discrimination and explained why she advocated for *The Sydney Statement* to be adapted by everyone in their everyday life. Each speaker's presentation was followed by a lively Q&A session.



Dr Qazi Ashfaq Ahmad OAM, by Patrick McNerney

إِنَّا لِلّٰهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ – “Indeed, to Allah we belong and to Allah we shall return.” (Quran 2:156)¹

On 11 February I attended the funeral prayers for [Dr Qazi Ashfaq Ahmad](#) at Rooty Hill Mosque, followed by the burial at Kemps Creek Cemetery. Dr Ahmad had died peacefully the day before at the age of 91. He was my elder by more than two decades, the patriarch of an extended family, a pioneer and leader for Muslims in Sydney, the founder of educational and community organisations, and an avid promoter of interfaith relations and societal harmony. But to me, above all, he was my friend.



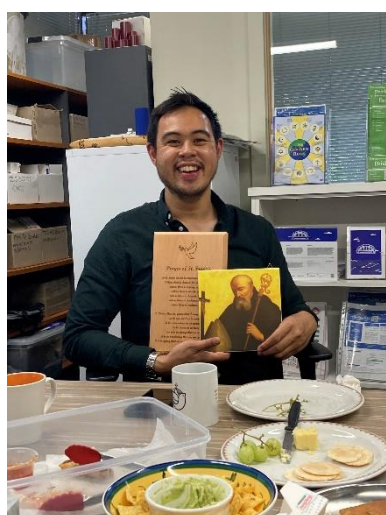
I met him many times at conferences, Muslim celebrations, and family occasions. I was often a guest at this house, especially for Eid. Whenever he saw me, his face lit up with a beaming smile. He would greet me affectionately with a kiss on each cheek. His kindness spanned our differences in age, culture, and religion. I was like an adopted member of his family.

I will miss my friend but take comfort that his legacy continues in the generations who follow his example. May Almighty God reward him for his long life of service to the Muslim communities and to the wider Australian society.

¹ Traditional Muslim salutation on hearing of the death of someone.

Visiting an Art Exhibition by Afghan Women, by Kim Chong

On 15 February the staff at the Centre visited the 'My Life, My Story' exhibition at the Blacktown Arts Centre. It was produced by Maryam Popal Zahid, founder of Afghan Women on the Move (AWOTM) and a committee member of the Western Sydney Women's InTHERfaith Initiative. The exhibition featured artwork by Afghani women expressing their life stories in the shadow of gender-based human rights violations brought on by war and the Taliban. Maryam kindly hosted the Centre team on the day and shared insights into the individual artworks and artists, which revealed the women's trauma, resilience, displacement and migration. Maryam's purpose for the exhibition was to provide Afghani women an opportunity to share their stories through creative arts and storytelling to help break cycles of isolation and disadvantage. The global AWOTM platform, based in Blacktown, unites women of the Afghan diaspora, supports them to find their voice, and empowers them with the tools and resources they need to feel valued and their differences respected.



Ryan visits! by Kim Chong

On 15 February, Centre staff was pleased to have former Youth & Networking Coordinator Ryan Epondulan return to the office for an afternoon tea and to receive the long-awaited gifts for his four years of service to the Centre. A delay in postage due to COVID meant the gifts that we had ordered for Ryan late last year did not arrive until the New Year. We presented Ryan with a hand-made wooden plaque from the USA, engraved with the peace prayer of St Francis of Assisi, and a tile of St Columban, all the way from Italy. We hope these gifts of our gratitude will provide Ryan with fond memories of his time with the Columbans and his service to interfaith dialogue.

Youth PoWR Event: Learning Together, by Sam Cherian

On 17 February Youth PoWR hosted our third event in a series of promotional events for *The Sydney Statement*. The event was called 'Learning Together: Building Bridges Through Understanding' and was primarily focused on the Dialogue of Knowledge from The Statement. Three young adults from different faith traditions were invited to share an aspect of their respective faiths. The topics included the Jewish afterlife; Christianity 101: through a multicultural lens; and the five pillars of Islam and their connection to inner peace. A series of discussions were conducted in which attendees compared what they learned from each speaker to the teachings of their respective faiths.



Synod Consultation on IRD, by Patrick McInerney

On 24 February the Centre hosted a consultation for the Synod of Bishops. We invited representatives from the Diocese of Parramatta, including the members of the Interfaith Commission, priests, religious, chancery, education and the bishop. We followed the format provided on the [Synod page](#) of the ACBC website, but instead of Communion, Participation and Mission, we focussed exclusively on Interreligious Dialogue. Sam Cherian was the MC, I was a speaker, and Kim Chong was the reporter.

I made the point that synodality is not just “intra-ecclesial”, but “bi-focal”. A truly synodal church is not just a mutual listening between laity, priests and bishops, but it is also Catholics listening to, learning from, and walking with people of all faiths and worldviews. To make this point real, we invited a Jewish Rabbi and a Muslim woman scholar to talk to us about their hopes and expectations of Catholic attitudes and behaviours towards Jews and Muslims. After their presentations, the 20 or so participants had a ‘spiritual conversation’ in groups. The reports of these groups will be collated, edited and submitted to the Synod of Bishops.

The more I think about it, the importance of this consultation is not so much the contents of the final submission, but the fact that this type of interfaith conversation took place at all! It was a truly ground-breaking experience that merits to be repeated in dioceses across Australia and the world. It is a great tribute to the missionary pioneering spirit of the Centre that we conceived of it and brought it off so successfully. We will write it up for Columban and other media.

Conclusion

The coming couple of months will be busy with Lent, Easter, Ramadan, Eid, Youth PoWR and WSWII events.

Wishing you every blessing during this grace-filled season of Lent.

Patrick McInerney

