

## CCCMR Report to the Region of Oceania

7 June 2022

### Introduction

Since Easter and Eid, interfaith activities seem to have increased significantly, with quite a few talks and events in the past month. Some were very important opportunities to build connections in the Diocese of Parramatta.



*Kim and Sam in the middle of the photo!*

#### **Eid Prayers, by Sam Cherian**

Eid al-Fitr was on Sunday, 1 May 2022. Having attended Iftar dinners over the previous month, the Team at CCCMR visited the Lakemba Mosque for the early morning Eid prayers. This was my first time attending such prayers and visiting a mosque. The Team carried stacks of envelopes that contained the PCID Eid message and the Centre's Eid card with well wishes for the feast. These were handed to individuals outside the mosque as they gathered to hear addresses from several community leaders and politicians while the others were placed at the entrance to the women's prayer room.



#### **Multicultural Eid Festival & Fair (MEFF), by Sam Cherian**

On Sunday, 15 May the Centre booked a stall at MEFF which took place at the Fairfield Showgrounds. MEFF is the largest multicultural Eid festival in NSW and hosts stalls that celebrate different cultures and cuisines. Our stall consisted of our resources, namely *The Sydney Statement*, *Ten Things about Islam*, *Ten MORE Things about Islam*, *The Golden Rule*, our product catalogue and postcards for Youth PoWR, WISWII and *The Sydney Statement*. The stall was open from 10am to 4:30pm and we were joined by Kim's family and a volunteer from Youth PoWR. There was a VIP welcome ceremony where Fr Patrick was invited to address the community. The day was filled with interesting conversations about our work and resources, delicious food 😊, but very few sales! 😞



#### **Clergy Conference, Parramatta, by Patrick McInerney**

On Tuesday 18 May, I gave a presentation to the Clergy Conference of Parramatta. My theme was "*Mission, Dialogue as part of Mission, and Synodality*". I grounded the 3 themes in the dynamics of the Trinity. The clergy are a very important group to have on side, even if they don't do much themselves, so long as they support interfaith, and support parishioners' involvements in interfaith. My presentation was very well received. It resulted in an invite to present the same content to the seminarians of the diocese. A full day has been set aside on 18 June. Other invites to parishes were also proposed, but I'm not holding my breath!



**WSWII Visits a Sikh Temple,**  
by Kim Chong

On 19 May, the Centre’s new women’s interfaith group, the Western Sydney Women’s InTHERfaith Initiative (WSWII), visited the Sikh temple in Glenwood, Sydney. Wearing

head scarves and with bare feet, the women were escorted into Gurudwara Sahib by the WSWII Sikh committee member, Harinder Kaur. Women of Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh faiths attended. Together we learned about the 10 gurus of Sikhism, spanning the 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries; the meaning behind the *khanda* (the symbol of the Sikh faith); and ways the Sikhs worship. Sikhs are devoted to giving to the needy, which is why the gurudwara has a community kitchen that serves meals to all free of charge, regardless of religion, gender, economic status, or ethnicity. The women were treated to such a meal after the temple visit. Together we sat on the floor and Sikh volunteers dished up delicious dahl, roti, rice, sweets and fruit for us to eat together. It was a joyous and uplifting day that showed just how relatable different religions can be in their core beliefs and service to humanity.



**ACU-PISAI Panel,** by Patrick McInerney

On Tuesday 24 May, I joined Dr Emmanuel Nathan (ACU) and Dr Zuleyha Keskin (Charles Sturt University) on the panel of three for the annual ACU/PISAI Rome Lecture. The topic was, “*Human fraternity and ecological conversion: Muslims and Christians in dialogue*”. Emmanuel gave a Christian perspective; Zuleyha gave a Muslim perspective; and I gave an interfaith perspective. The international online event was conducted very professionally. The video is available at: <https://vimeo.com/716598622/cc4d8f8d43>. I have just heard this evening that the papers may be published.



**Mission Team CEDP,** by Patrick McInerney

After nearly a year’s delay due to COVID, on Thursday 26 May I presented to the Mission Team of Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta. My theme was “*Mission, Interreligious Dialogue in Mission, and the work of CCCMR*”, adapting the talk I used for the clergy. This is another very important group for the Centre. They are already on side. The Director of Mission, who made the invitation, is a personal contact. With 80 schools, 43,000 students and almost 5,000 staff, the leadership, teachers and students of CEDP can become mass allies in promoting and living interfaith across Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. We look forward to collaborating with them and resourcing them.



**Blessing of Bishop Bede Heather Centre,** by Patrick McInerney

On 26 May, Bishop Vincent blessed the re-named Bishop Bede Heather Centre, where our CCCMR offices are located. The diocese invited many guests to celebrate the occasion. There were fond recollections of Bishop Bede Heather. For details see: <https://bit.ly/395Agjy>



**Buddhist Council Gala Dinner**, by Sam Cherian

On Sunday, 29 May the CCCMR team and Fr Kevin Medilo (Interfaith Commission, Parramatta) attended the first ever Buddhist Council Gala Dinner at the Crystal Palace in Canley Vale. Upon arrival we were met by individuals from different Southeast Asian cultures wearing their beautiful traditional attires. The venue was decorated with flowers and had a live band that played Lao music. We joined Joseph La Posta, CEO of Multicultural NSW, at table and enjoyed a night full of delicious Lao food and performances from different Southeast Asian cultures which included a Bollywood performance and a Thai blessing. Patrick represented the Centre as he addressed the crowd and spoke on the importance of interreligious dialogue.



**Shoah Memorial Service**, by Patrick McNerney

On Tuesday 31 May I gave the keynote address at the Shoah Memorial Service arranged by the NSW Council of Christians and Jews. It was an extraordinary privilege, challenge and responsibility. It was the first time a Christian had been invited to give the address. It was a very daunting task. On previous occasions, survivors of the Shoah and children of survivors had spoken. I know I could not match them. Instead, I told my own story of long being ignorant of Jews and Judaism, and the conversion that took place through personal meeting, reading and reflection. It was also a privilege for a Catholic priest to speak from the pulpit of The Great Synagogue, which I assume does not happen often. My talk was very well received. It is available on the Columban website at: <https://bit.ly/3Q6JJYg> and may be published in other Christian and Jewish media.

**The Kettle’s Back On**, by Kim Chong

One of the delights of returning to the Centre post COVID-restrictions is the influx of visitors to the office in Blacktown, Sydney. Just in the last month, we have hosted Fr Sunil Paul SVD from the Jansen Spirituality Centre, our very own CEO, Maha Shawky, both from Melbourne, and Fr Patrick’s sister-in-law, Deirdre McNerney, who came all the way from Adelaide. To be able to meet again face-to-face over a cuppa and a bite to eat is one of the greatest gifts coming out of lockdown. It proves just what a difference it makes to see each other in person rather than just online when it comes to strengthening connections. We look forward to your visit!



*With Maha Shawky!*



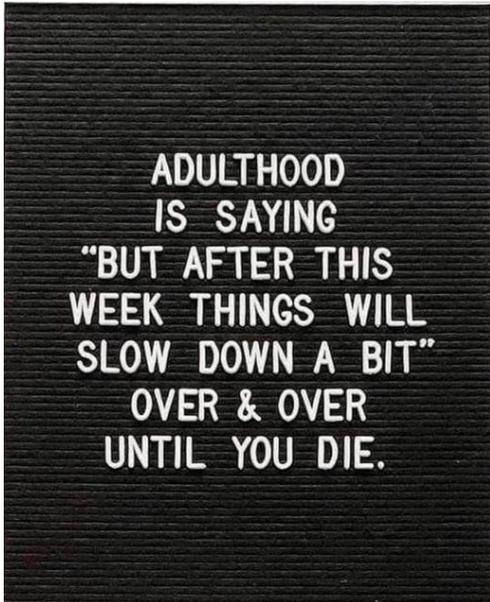
*With Deirdre McNerney*

**Conclusion**

The coming months promise more engagements!

Wishing you blessings of peace and joy throughout Ordinary time!

*Patrick McNerney*



This is what it feels like working in interfaith!!



At least no one can say we're just looking on from the sidewalk!



This is our newly-blessed front door panel.

The Diocese of Parramatta have claimed us!

They put their name and logo!!!

We missed an opportunity to brand ourselves with the Columban logo!!

*Sic transit gloria mundi!!*

But maybe it is a prophetic sign of the future already impinging on our present!?!?