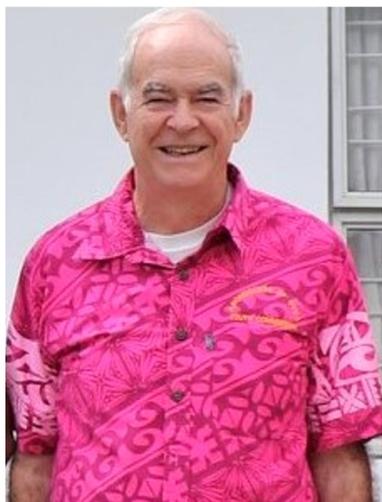




ANNUAL INTER – RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE REPORT

EDITORIAL

LESSONS FROM A TIME OF COVID



Fr. Frank Hoare
Columban Deputy Leader, Fiji

Was there ever anything like it? In these past two years humanity has undergone a shared experience of fear, confusion, dissension, and depression. Now we are faced with the challenge of a third wave in Fiji. So what have we learnt from these past two years? How have our different religious communities responded? Has COVID brought us closer together or left us further apart?

We have certainly learned that the world is a village. National boundaries or religious affiliations

don't stop pandemics. We realize that we are all in this together. What happens here today will spread there tomorrow. We also see that short-sighted selfish nationalism can harm everyone.

We suffered the fear of our own frailty. Radical persecutory opinions on the internet sowed confusion and chaos in the minds of some people. Others realized the importance of having a meaningful direction and goal in our lives. We turned in prayer to God.

During the pandemic we have also experienced how human goodness and generosity can give light and hope to many. So many Faith based groups, NGOs and individuals have reached out to others in need during this very testing time.

As we shared our Interfaith responses to COVID 19 and to the environmental crisis that lies behind it we were strengthened in understanding and response by the example and motivation of members of other faiths. We learned from their wisdom and creativity and we were heartened by our reflection and action together.

This report from the Columban Interreligious Dialogue desk reminds us of the interfaith sessions we had together in Suva during the last 18 months, either face to face or virtually. Looking through the photos and accompanying commentary will remind us of those inspiring events.

My hope for 2022 is that we who are involved in Interreligious dialogue can bring others to share in the richness of these relationships. Let us not keep it a closed shop but invite other young people in our faith traditions to learn, share and find God in our searching.

INTERNATIONAL INTERFAITH YOUTH PROGRAMME 16th—24th MAY 2020

Guided by the theme “Everything is interconnected” our IRD desk at the Columban mission office was involved in this Interfaith youth program. It consisted of a 3-part webinar series using zoom conference platform to empower and motivate the youths of Fiji to care and protect our common home, Mother Earth.

Representatives from the Sikh Gurudwara and Muslim communities, Shri Satya Sai Organization and the Roman Catholic Church were invited to the 1st zoom program where Fr. Kurtz Pala from the Philippines gave a brief but creative presentation. He gave some examples of realities that occurred in Myanmar where he works which Fiji youths could easily relate to.

In session 2, Ms Iemaima Va'ai encouraged the participants to use the power and energy of their voices to advocate for the protection of our common home to ensure that there will be a future for us and for future generations.

In the final session, participants were encouraged to make practical plans in their own faith community in response to the climate crisis and share what their faith traditions say about caring for our common home. This program was organized because this is an urgent call for all faith traditions and for the whole human family.



For younger generation let's care for our common home

Laudato Si is the name of the letter concerning the environment that Pope Francis wrote to members of the Catholic Church and to all interested people throughout the world in 2015.

IRD GATHERING AT SHIV MANDIR HALL, SAMABULA - JULY 18th 2020

The topic for this gathering was “What I have learned from Life and How I hope to Grow Spiritually.” About 80 to 90 people attended and all were invited to purify their hands with a sanitizer before being seated. Participants were requested to observe the 1.5 metres between family groups. This was our first meeting and experience after the first wave Covid 19 restrictions were lifted.

Ms Priscilla Magdalin introduced the program, Fr Frank Hoare welcomed everyone, and the Interfaith Search Prayer for Fiji was led by Pundit Ramesh Sharma.



Fr Frank Hoare welcoming different religions for the evening



The Arya Samaj group from Nausori led by Pundita Gaitri sang a lively bhajan to begin the evening



A prayer and a hymn in English was sung by young members of the Bahai faith. They also advised living in harmony for the welfare of society and seeking the companionship of the righteous



Mere (with Titilia) from Sacred Heart Cathedral gave an inspiring talk saying that COVID 19 has helped her to slow down and stop rushing. She rejoiced that Mother Earth got a chance to breathe again



The Muslim Community was represented by three gentlemen, led by Imran Janif. He reminded us that Teihard de Chardin said that ‘we are not humans on a spiritual journey, we are spiritual beings on an earthly journey’. We should not take for granted the blessings we have received but strive to live nearer to God and be united with each other in Fiji

IRD GATHERING AT SHIV MANDIR HALL, SAMABULA - JULY 18th 2020



The Anglican Church was represented by William Damudamu accompanied by Felisi and Moape, who suggested that we leave our comfort zone and live by the fruits of the Holy Spirit, love, joy, peace and patience



Christopher, who led the group from Raiwaqa Parish, found saying the Rosary with his family in the vernacular (during the COVID 19 restrictions) a big achievement. He invited us to do small things with great love as Mother Theresa advocated



Asheeta Sharma drew our attention to the problems of hunger in our world and the harm we have done to the earth. Nevertheless, she encouraged us to be grateful to God



Rahul of the Hari Rama Hari Krishna organization emphasized the need of our souls to worship God, just as our bodies have need of work. We are all children of God so there should be no hatred among us

MORE PHOTOS AT SHIV TEMPLE GATHERING AT SAMABULA



We finished the evening with a beautiful vegetarian meal provided by the Sharma Family. We are grateful to you the Sharma family for your love and generosity. Other pictures of the evening below

A CELEBRATION OF CREATION 2020

This celebration was to be held in My Suva Park on Saturday 3rd October. Because of heavy rain it was switched indoors. The Rector of PRS, Fr. Simon Mani, welcomed all present to the Pacific Regional Seminary. Fr Teakare began the program with the Interfaith Prayer. Ms Marjorie Engcoy gave a brief introduction on Peace and Integrity of Creation. She emphasised the need for us to be good stewards and look after and protect our environment.

Different faith groups shared on “What my Faith Says about Care and Protection of Mother Earth” through prayers, mime and spiritual hymns. The aim for this project was to renew our relationship with our Creator and all Creation through celebration, conversion and commitment together.

Different aspects of creation were highlighted: Mother Earth, animals and biodiversity, justice for the poor, refugees and women, air, fresh water and the ocean, plants, grasses and trees. Groups suggested many ways to renew and protect our relationship with our creator and all of creation.

Despite the bad weather, it was a powerful gathering enjoyed by 150 people of different faiths. The program concluded with a vegetarian meal provided by the Hare Krishna organization.



Fr. Teakare Betero led the Interfaith prayer



A Bhajan was sung by the younger members of the Shri Sanatan Dharm on the responsibility of protecting/saving 'Mother Earth'



A group of Sunni Muslim's ladies presented on the importance of fresh water-and how the ocean provides so much of our food. Thus, the importance of protecting our rivers and sea



A CELEBRATION OF CREATION 2020



Anglican youth presented a hymn on Creation - its values and goodness as created by God and our need to care for and protect it



Youths from Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji singing a bhajan on the beauty of God's Creation and His love for us



Young members of the Bahai Faith performing a drama calling for justice for the poor, refugees and women, emphasizing that everyone get adequate healthcare and respect



A Shri Satya Sai youth sharing on the importance of Biodiversity for the production of our food and for health



Laucala Bay and Raiwaqa Parish Youth groups emphasized how plants and grass protect the soil against erosion, and trees provide oxygen and create a peaceful environment

A CELEBRATION OF CREATION 2020



Raiwaqa Youths during their presentation on Care of Environment



Interfaith discussion continues how we can take care of our environment



Enjoying vegetarian meals and laughter together

TELL ME A STORY—21st NOV 2020

Younger members of faith organizations gathered on the 21st November 2020, to participate in a gathering on the topic "TELL ME A STORY" at the Sacred Heart Cathedral Crypt.

The aim was to understand different faith communities through their stories. On this occasion, the youths from six different faiths dramatized, mimed and told stories from their holy scriptures on love, truth, joy, mercy, death and resurrection.

More than one hundred and twenty five people attended this event. The big message of the evening was "God is found where people love one another".

The youths particularly enjoyed an ice-breaker session called Merry-Go-Round, led by Fr. Frank Hoare, where they briefly spoke with unfamiliar others. The joy, humor, energy of their mixing was great to see. Something new was happening – shyness and reticence began to disappear. Many stayed on to help with cleaning up while continuing to chat among themselves. This surely made the evening and this event a success.

The evenings program ended with a short prayer in Sanskrit, Hindi and English led by Pandita Gaitri for a vegetarian meal.

It was a great opportunity break down of walls of division and build bridges of friendship.



Arya Samaj group drama performance on Truth



Dudely Methoist Group performing a roleplay on Life, Death and Resurrection



Shri Sanatan Dharm Group performing on the Joy of Diwali



A group of adult ladies joining the young people

TELL ME A STORY—NOV 21st 2020



Nadera and Tamavua youths on Mercy and Love



Young people meeting young people from other religions



The sharing and chat continued over dinner

TELL ME A STORY—NOV 21st 2020



Groups of youths attended the evening event



Young people coming together in groups to strengthen interfaith relations

INTERNATIONAL WOMENS DAY EVENT 8th March 2021

The Archdiocese of Suva Caritas celebrated International Women's Day with theme 'Women in leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in a Covid-free World'. It was a day to reflect on gender equality, empowerment of women, violence against women and their children. The different faith groups which joined the celebration were acknowledged.

All faiths were invited to focus on challenging the mentality, culture, and other barriers that women face in achieving gender equality. Leadership of women should continue to increase in all areas of public life, and in faith communities. Collectively, we can all help create an inclusive world, shape a more equal future as we recover from the Covid 19 Pandemic. We must continue to highlight the gaps that remain.



Group of women and men at the IWD Celebration Day



Sharing her experiences and the challenges faced during COVID 19



Steering Committee of women from different religions



Different faiths joining the Celebration

PEACEBUILDING 20 FEBRUARY, 2021

On February 20th, 2021 the Columban Inter-Religious desk sponsored a workshop/meeting on peacebuilding. Young people came from the Arya Samaj, Shri Sanatan Dharam, Muslim Community, Methodist Church of Fiji, Catholic Church, and the Bahai Faith to share the spirituality of their religions about peace, love, and care for one another. One hundred and thirty people who attended heard each other's ideas about peacebuilding and love.

During the evening, different groups shared on responsibilities to welcome and assist the poor, the sick, the excluded and to care for our neighbors. We need to build peace everywhere and to restore any love that has been lost. Acts of kindness can lead to forgiveness and healing.



Bahai Faith sharing their message on Peace and Inclusion in Schools



Different religions enjoying the session on a more just and peaceful society



Act of kindness in the neighborhood from the Dudley Methodist youths



Different faiths sharing together in groups

PEACEBUILDING 20 FEBRUARY, 2021



Merry go round exercise where young members of different religions share with each other



Youths singing a hymn on Peace and understanding between ethnic groups

USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR A RELIGIOUS MESSAGE—17 April 2021

This event for youth took place at the Sacred Heart Cathedral. The theme was “Social Media” chosen to encourage young people to use Social media to express religious messages of their faith.

The messages were put across by song, dance, mime, poem, story, and some quotations from scriptures. The live performances by youths on the stage were filmed and then screened on the video set in order to encourage the use of social media platforms for mission and evangelization.

This was the last face to face gathering we were able to have in 2021 as the delta variant of COVID 19 spread rapidly in Fiji necessitating lockdown and later severe social restrictions.



Another ‘merry go round’ session was held where members of different religions met each other face to face



Looking at the ‘social media’ presentations that the groups presented to put across their messages



A mixed group of young people who presented at the evening’s event

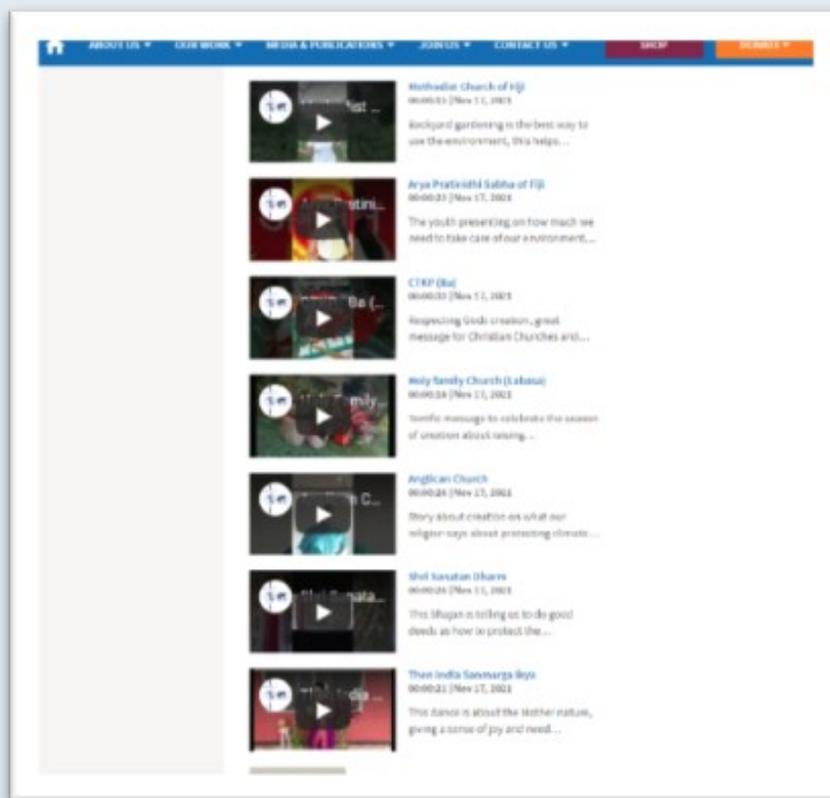
ZOOM INTERFAITH PROGRAMME ON THE ENVIRONMENT—22 SEP 21

At a zoom IRD committee meeting on the 17th of August discuss ideas on the theme of the celebration of creation it was agreed to ask youths to make short videos on aspects of environmental protection. Other ideas mentioned were backyard gardening, awareness creation through social media, display of banners with ecology messages.

The IRD coordinator organized a zoom webinar on 22nd September with video presentations , this was hosted by Fr. Frank Hoare.. The program began after a short prayer and a word of welcome with a one hour BBC film on climate change and its dangers. This was followed by 3-minute creative video presentations by different faith groups on “What our religion says about protecting Creation.

The videos highlighted of key scripture passages, spiritual bhajans, dance, a poem and backyard gardening. The Methodist Church, Shri Sanatan Dharm , T.I.S.I Sangam, the Anglican Church, Arya Samaj, the Bahai faith and groups from Ba and Labasa parishes of the Catholic church all participated. The presentation by the Pacific Regional Seminarians was significant as they will be future leaders of their Church. All the messages were on the same theme but also reflected something of the teaching and culture of the presenting faith community. Particularly striking was the South Indian dance performed by Ms Vintika. Please click on the link given below to view the **Season of Creation Videos:**

<https://www.columban.org.fj/our-work/inter-religious-dialogue/season-of-creation>



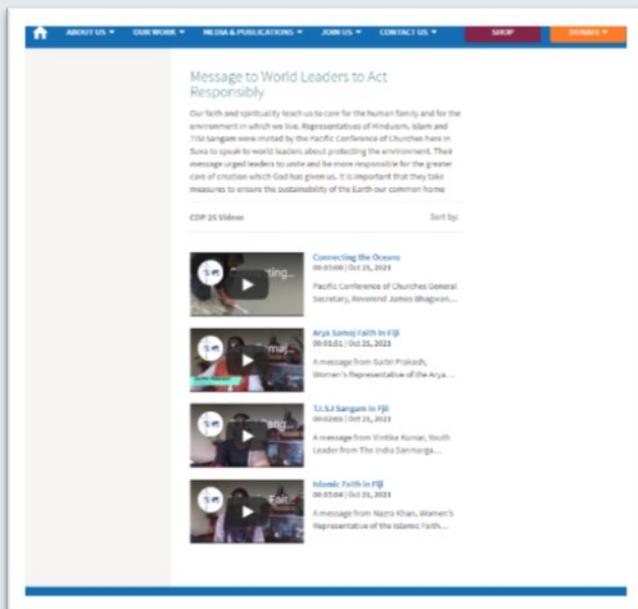
COP SIDE EVENT IN SUVA –6 OCTOBER 2021

In mid-October, I received an email from the Pacific Conference of Churches here in Suva that they are putting up banners for Global Action on Climate Change. Because of our multi-faith community in Fiji, they requested the Interreligious Dialogue desk to assist in getting a few interfaith leaders/youths to deliver a message on climate change that they want to share with the rest of the world through video presentations. This side event took place at the Pacific Conference of Churches office where they recorded key messages on the question: With the conviction of your faith, if given the chance to speak to the world leaders about protecting the environment, what would that message be?

The videos were made by members from the Muslim community, Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji and Then India Sanmarga Ikya Sangam of Fiji. Their video presentations captured the message on Climate Crisis which is ultimately linked to a crisis of values, ethics, and spirituality, to be stewards and protectors of creation.

Please click on the link given below to view the videos from various Religious groups:

<https://www.columban.org.fj/our-work/inter-religious-dialogue/cop-26-videos/>



Women of faith in Fiji calling world leaders to act responsibly at Cop 26



Banner calling on people of faith to unite for care of the environment

COP 26 MARCH IN SUVA, - 6 NOVEMBER, 2021

A Peaceful March was organized by FNU students supported by the Columbans in solidarity with our Fiji Leaders in Glasgow at COP 26 to highlight the devastation that climate change can wreak on the Pacific Islands. FNU students from Lautoka and Suva, students from Corpus Christi Teachers Training Collage, and a few parish youths were joined by some Hindu IRD members. The march was stopped by the police who were suspicious that it was to be an anti-government protest. Most of the marchers eventually gathered at PRS for prayers, hymns and heard a talk by Adi Mariana Waqa on the devastating effects of Climate Change. Because of the police interference the march received extensive press coverage, on TV and on Social Media.



Fr. Frank Hoare (standing 2nd from left, FNU students, parish youth and members of faith groups at PRS after being stopped by Police

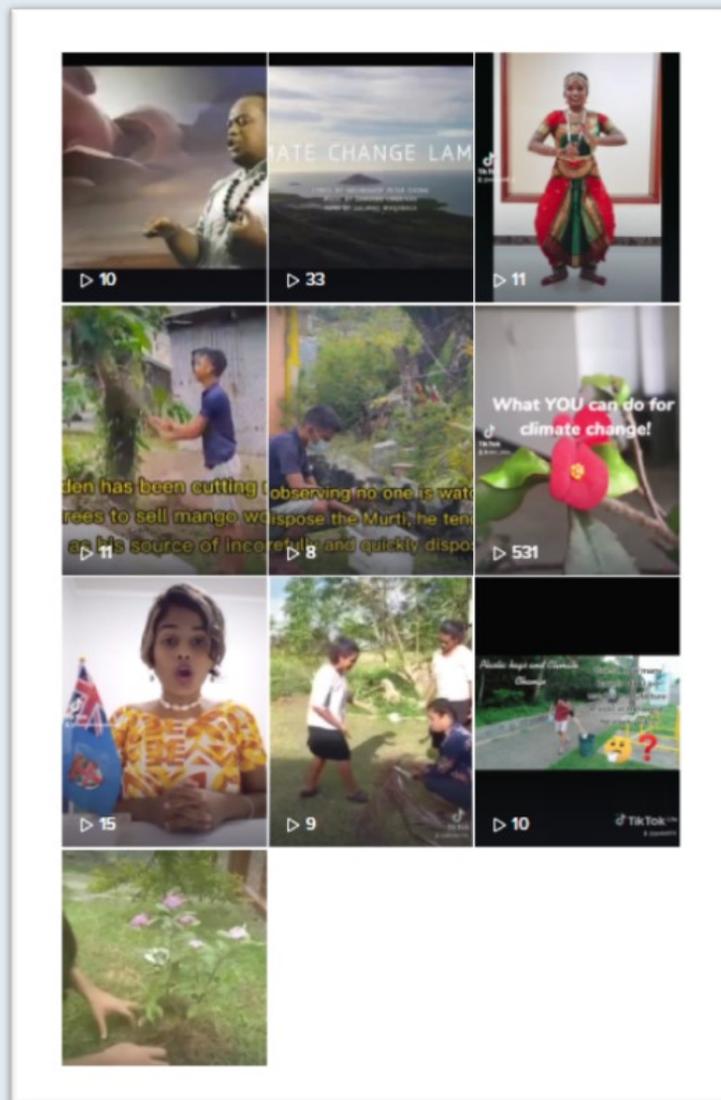
INTERRELIGIOUS TIK TOK CHALLENGE ON RESPECTING THE ENVIRONMENT—10 NOVEMBER 2021

God gave us a garden; we must not pass on a desert to the next generation.

On Wednesday November 10th, 2021 the Columban Interreligious Dialogue desk organized a webinar featuring a Tik Tok challenge which involved making a video of not more than 30 seconds on the theme of respecting and protecting the environment. This webinar also included a short news film on the challenges facing COP 26 and an excerpt on former President Obama's assessment of the success of COP 26.

Special thanks are due to the youths from different faith traditions who sent their creative 30 second video presentations on preventing climate destruction. It was well done and very much appreciated. The presentations are uploaded on our IRD TIK TOK Account.

For more click on the link https://www.tiktok.com/@columbanfiji_ird



Mrs Tessa Mackenzie from IFSF

Mrs. Tessa McKenzie of the Anglican Church in Fiji resigned from Interfaith Search Fiji towards the end of 2021. She was one of the founder members of Interfaith Search and was a guiding presence until now. She was also a strong supporter of the Columban Interreligious Dialogue programs for young people in Suva. We thank Tessa for her great wisdom, for her enquiring religious spirit and for the inspiration she has given to us. We wish her many happy years of retirement.



Mrs Tessa Mackenzie



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