



Members acclaim the new constitution of BWCP Inc



Truth is like a great mirror shattered by time into a hundred thousand pieces which enable all who possess a small fragment to declare, 'My Religion – Truth – is the true one.' Sufi Gibral Kham

This was one of the many wisdom texts displayed for reflection in the Hindu Mandir temple on a recent open day (see p.2). The image it presents can serve as a metaphor for interfaith dialogue. On the one hand, keeping one's vision fixed only on one's own small fragment of truth tends to lead to misconceptions and distortions about others' truths, religious and cultural.

On the other hand, it is possible to imagine what might happen if all the fragments of the shattered mirror were to start coming together again into a whole. A person looking into the mirror could then begin to see the reflection not only of her own truth but that of something larger and capable of encompassing 'a hundred thousand' possibilities.

Editor

A new public identity

Another milestone in the association's brief 'her-story' was reached on 13 August when the first general meeting of BWCP Inc was held at Justice Place, Woolloongabba. Central to the occasion was the affirmation of the constitution. Using the official Model Rules as a template, details specific to BWCP's identity and way of operating had been incorporated, as agreed at a general meeting in May. The present meeting provided the opportunity for an initial exploration of what the constitution would mean for the future functioning of the association.

Other important items dealt with at the meeting were the appointment of an auditor and the agreement that seven members of the Steering Committee responsible for monitoring the workplan and budget under the *Living in Harmony* grant would serve as the interim Coordinating Committee of BWCP Inc until the association's first annual general meeting. The Committee later agreed on the office bearers as follows: Mia Leigh – Chairperson, Christine Fensham – Deputy Chairperson, Genevieve Caffery – Treasurer, Wendy Flannery – Secretary.

The occasion also provided the opportunity for a brief overview of the year's activities to date and forward planning up till the end of 2005. The meeting concluded with a special celebratory afternoon tea.

Other Recent Events

Visit to Hindu Mandir temple – 17 July 2005

Six BWCP members – Genevieve Caffery, Wendy Flannery, Mairi McKay, Margaret Naylor, Mira Orlich, and Mojgan Vafaei and her family – were able to accept the invitation from Mrs Premala Prasher, Hindu Mandir Association of Queensland, to an open day at the Association's temple and community centre in Burbank. Premala had participated in our Harmony Day Peace Walk, conducting a Hindu ritual at the stopping point on the Goodwill Bridge.



Organised in conjunction with the Queensland Music Festival, the open day offered visitors the opportunity 'to experience and enjoy an informal glimpse of the rich Hindu culture... , tour the temple and gain an insight into Hindu religion, worship, symbolism and iconography'. The musical programme was a virtual feast of sacred Indian performance, including instrumental, devotional singing and dance.

BWCP members who attended appreciated this unique opportunity to immerse themselves in the explanations and illustrations of ancient Indian religious traditions in the temple and to engage in dialogue with the resident priest. The iconography, and in particular the multiplicity of representations of divine beings, prompted many questions. It was offset by the seemingly paradoxical assertion that 'there is but one God who pervades all things'.

As well as enjoying the musical programme and food, visitors were able to join in moments of prayer in the temple and in a joyous communal sacred dance that marked the end of the day's events. BWCP members look forward to building more enduring relationships with women of Hindu and Sikh traditions in Brisbane.

Upcoming events

25 September: Thematic dialogue on 'Transforming Conflict'.

6 November: Idul Fitri celebration hosted by Mia Leigh and Sitti Maesuri, at their Bardon residence.

27 November: Open planning meeting for 2006.

27 November: Thematic Dialogue on 'Violence Against Women'.

Special commemorations

21 September: International Day of Peace

16 November: International Day for Tolerance

25 November: International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

Website wisdom

The first International Congress on Islamic Feminism is about to be held in Barcelona, Spain, co-sponsored by the UNESCO Catalan centre. The conference programme is shaped by the idea of conducting a 'gender jihad' against biased readings of the sacred texts in the Islamic tradition. The address is: www.feminismeislamic.org/eng/congress

Special notice

The DIMIA *Living in Harmony* grant which has supported BWCP's activities since September 2004 will finish at the end of August. Members will be invited to participate in an evaluation process that will feed into the final report.

Thematic dialogue session on 'Environment/Creation' – 24 July 2005

Presenters: Frederika Westerman (a Christian perspective);
Monica Samali (using Kathryn Philippe's notes – a Baha'i perspective);
and Mia Leigh (an Islamic perspective).

Chair Wendy Flannery

Report by Dolores Creevey

Each of the presenters gave a short input based on sacred texts, prayers and personal reflections. A period of group work followed, with two leading questions circulated in advance:

- How do I understand creation and the world of nature from my faith/spiritual perspective?
- How does this understanding affect my relationship to the environment and my attitude to present day concerns about the environment?

In the open sharing that followed the group work, the following ideas emerged as common themes across many religious and spiritual traditions:

- The whole of creation has a divine source and reveals the divine presence; God is active in the pattern of an unfolding universe.
- All creatures are interconnected and interdependent – despite the human illusion of being 'higher' and 'separate' from the rest of creation.
- Everything has a 'seed of God'; all creatures are of equal value and deserve to be treated with respect.
- Humans have a 'duty of care' for other creatures, a role of 'stewardship';
- natural resources should be used with moderation, not rapaciously exploited.
- The relationship between science and faith is a complementary one. This last point is illustrated in an interesting way in a reflection from the Baha'i faith:

The purpose of the creation of humanity is, therefore, unity and harmony, not discord and separateness. If the atoms which compose the kingdom of the minerals were without affinity for each other, the earth would never have been formed, the universe could not have been created. Because they have affinity for each other, the power of life is able to manifest itself, and the organisms of the phenomenal world become possible. When this attraction or atomic affinity is destroyed, the power of life ceases to manifest; death and nonexistence result.

Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 4

Other activities of members

12 July: Genevieve Caffery, Mia Leigh and Wendy Flannery accepted the invitation by the Catholic Justice & Peace Commission to a dialogue on peace-making with Jef Felix from Belgium, a member of the Executive Committee of Pax Christi International.

18 July: BWCP book club discussion of *Beyond Beijing: the Next Step for Women*, by Joan Chittister.

13 August: Several members participated in workshops connected with the international symposium on 'Cultivating Wisdom, Harvesting Peace', at the Multi-Faith Centre, Griffith University.

27 August: Four members prepared and participated in an interfaith ceremony at the Nepalese Pagoda, South Bank parklands, in collaboration with the Multi-Faith Centre, Griffith University and refugee support groups, for annual Tampa Day commemorations.

Some of the members and friends who gathered for the dialogue on Environment/Creation'



Member profiles



Mairi McKay

I grew up on a sheep farm in the south island of New Zealand. I attended the Church of Christ even though my mother's side were Presbyterian, which always led to disagreements about the authentic form of christening needed for salvation. I was never allowed to mix with Maori people and my father was always annoyed when my mother bought vegetables from the Chinese greengrocer. As for Roman Catholics, they were pagans and we were not allowed to have dealings with them!

After becoming a nurse, getting married and having three children I abandoned the Church of Christ and started to explore other sources of spiritual enlightenment, especially those grounded in Eastern wisdom. In this period I also discovered the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and found it very comfortable to sit for an hour in silence with them, knowing that they were not bogged down in doctrine but accepted the diversity of members' faith perspectives with a common commitment to social justice. At the moment I feel that I can incorporate the silence of Quaker worship with Buddhist teachings. Visiting India has developed my conviction of the importance of ritual in spiritual life as expressed in Hindu and Sikh traditions.

I was excited to learn about BWCP. It has been great for me to meet women of different faiths on a personal basis and to grow in understanding of their beliefs and traditions, including women from three different strands of Islam. The group also has an important role in bringing more peace and understanding to the world. All my exploration has led me to the conviction of a universal truth running through all religions.



Christine Fensham

I'm a Lancashire lass born into a solid Methodist family. From my mother I learnt that to speak up on other than domestic issues was OK - she spoke to many public meetings on behalf of the Methodist Missionary Society. From my father, as a psychiatrist living close to mental institutions, I learnt that the dividing line between normal and abnormal behaviour was a fine one.

I was evacuated during the London war bombing to an all girls Quaker boarding school which I loved, and after the early death of my father and obtaining a degree in biochemistry I joined my mother in Bristol where the local church had formed a club at which I met a PhD student from Australia, Peter Fensham. We married and left for Melbourne in 1956 with our one-year-old daughter. I always wanted 4 children so produced 3 boys, taking mothering seriously, though I managed to train as a science teacher.

Moving to women's health issues in the context of the Neighbourhood House initiative, my consciousness as a feminist, Christian and political woman were linked for the first time. I lapped up books on Feminist Theology, increasingly recognising the distortions that men's interpretations had imposed on the Christian Gospel message and the exclusion of women's voices from all the power structures of the Church. With other women's backing, I tackled my local church to allow me to set up a Neighbourhood House on their property and in less than 5 years 500 women were attending classes there. What an inspiring experience to see women arrive with no self confidence being gently transformed into assertive human beings! God as 'He' can be transformed into God as 'She'.

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