



Remembering refugee women



Interfaith ceremony to commemorate World Refugee Day

19 June 2005

Braving the constant drizzling rain, a group of BWCP members and friends gathered in the small rotunda at the top of the Kangaroo Point cliffs for a ceremony to express solidarity with refugee women. The visual effect of the BWCP banner was complemented by the beautiful posters prepared for this year's commemorations by the UN High Commission for Refugees.

As well as a sharing of prayers and extracts from various sacred texts, the ceremony included sharing of stories of refugee women. Some guests of members had their own very moving personal stories to tell, while other stories were passed on 'second hand' by those whose hearts they had touched.

The venue is a popular stopping point for visitors wanting a bird's eye view of Brisbane city, and several were attracted to the ceremony. Those involved in a march to the venue of the main events a short distance away passed by, and several made a brief stop to express support and appreciation for the BWCP contribution.

The choice of 'Creation' as the focus for both an interfaith retreat and a thematic dialogue provokes, among other things, a variety of thoughts about 'origins'. For a start, it reminds us that where we are born and who we are born to are beyond our control.

The expectation that people coming to Australia from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds will just meld into the dominant culture ignores or overlooks this fundamental reality. The comfort and certainty that uniformity generates take precedence over other values.

Recognising the circumstances of our origins as 'given' can expand our spiritual capacity to appreciate and be amazed at human diversity. It can also make us more sensitive to what we share in common as human beings: similar fears, basic needs and desires. Shared also is our entitlement to the same basic rights, including the rights to be safe and secure and to be treated with respect. Only by being willing to move out of our comfort zone can we live out of – and be enriched by – this 'inclusive' perspective.

Editor

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Recent Events

Dialogue session on 'Developing a Peace-Building Identity' – 7 May 2005

Presenter Dr Winnifred Louis, School of Psychology, University of Queensland
Chair Wendy Flannery
Report by Margaret Rebgetz

A lecturer in social psychology, Dr Louis sub-titled her presentation, 'Motivating yourself and others to value and create a peaceful world'. Addressing a group of 15 BWCP members and friends, Dr Louis raised the question of why the contemporary peace movement finds it hard to mobilize and retain interest. She then proceeded to explore the issues of how people decide to work for different social issues, why peace is valued so little, and steps to take to ensure that peace is valued more.

Dr Louis indicated that many social groups don't have a link into the peace movement network. She pointed out that, despite the huge turnouts across Australia and the world in the peace marches prior to the invasion of Iraq, a month afterwards there was a 75% drop off in interest in relation to peace issues. Her explanation for this from a social theory perspective is that people who join groups seek gratification and visible proof that their efforts and expectations are realised. For the peace movement, where the goals are longer term and more abstract, it is difficult to mobilise and maintain interest and motivation. Hence her suggestion that those working in peace activism need to plan for concrete and functional outcomes, to ensure that some immediate, positive effects can be obtained.

Dr Louis proceeded to elaborate on ways people who join a peace group can learn about the costs and benefits of war and peace and become committed to developing public awareness of the costs associated with aggression, violence and war. However, she advised of the hazards when attempting to persuade others of one's beliefs in relation to peace matters, such as being seen to be disloyal or polarizing. Her suggestion was that peacemakers work at being seen to be an impartial third parties who provide creative solutions to issues. Presenting matters in such a way that the commonalities and similarities with others are acknowledged provides an opening for issues to be raised and explored.



Presentation & Dialogue on Buddhism – 22 May 2005 Presenter Lyn Kelly Chair Christine Fensham Report by Mairi McKay

At the invitation of a BWCP member with a strong interest in Buddhism, Lyn Kelly kindly agreed to present an introduction to the history of Buddhism and its main teachings, and to share her personal experience as a dedicated Buddhist, focusing on its value as a lens for self-understanding.

Lyn pointed out some of the key differences in the development of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. One point she emphasised, however, was that 'it is not a religion you start a war over!' Its focus, rather, is on ethical behaviour based on the four noble truths and following the eight-fold path, with the underlying rule, 'Create no harm'. Equanimity, joy, compassion and loving-kindness are the outcome.

A very profound spiritual dialogue with Lyn followed her presentation, with parallels being drawn to Sufism and mystical traditions in other faiths. Several members commented afterwards that Lyn's presentation was the clearest expose of Buddhism they had ever heard.



Dr Winnifred Louis with the guest of a member

**Weekend retreat, on the theme of
Creation/environment –
25 & 26 June 2005**
'Four Winds', Ocean View

'I felt like I had been away for years. We must have been in a different world. Love to do it again soon.' This was the immediate afterthought of one of the eleven members of BWCP who spent two days together for an interfaith retreat. The venue was an environment centre in a beautiful natural setting northwest of Brisbane, overlooking the Sunshine Coast. A small planning group prepared a draft programme and all participants were invited to contribute ideas and take leadership roles.

A substantial part of the first day was allocated to contributions from each participant on the theme of 'Environment/Creation', using texts from their respective faith traditions and personal reflections. The emphasis was on understanding and appreciation rather than discussion or debate. The screening of a segment from David Suzuki's series, 'The Sacred Balance', brought first day of the retreat to a close.

The programme also offered the opportunity to engage in ritual practices from different traditions, including Zikr (sacred chanting and body movement in the Sufi tradition), body prayer based on elements of Yoga and Tai Chi, and a peace dance. The second day included the invitation to each person to express her personal sense of self in Creation in a creative way, for example, in poetry, prayer, drawing, dance. Woven into this part of the programme, courtesy of the director of the centre, was a symbolic journey through the 14 billion year story of the universe.

Everyone agreed that a special bonus of the retreat was the social interaction made possible by the extended time together, especially over meals to which everyone had made a contribution.



Coming together at the conclusion of the retreat



Engaging with the story of the universe through the Cosmic Walk

Other activities of members

29 & 30 April & 1 May: Mia Leigh and Wendy Flannery participated in the first Warwick Peace Festival and made contacts with several multicultural and peace groups from Warwick and Toowoomba.

7 May: Mojgan Vafaei gave the guest address on 'Women in Iran' at a meeting of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

16 May: Book club discussion of *A History of God* by Karen Armstrong.

22 May: A General Meeting was held for decision-making on the process of becoming an incorporated association.

23 May: Five members participated in an e-Democracy workshop offered by Women's Infolink (Office of Women) to women's community organisations.

31 May: BWCP co-sponsored a panel discussion for Reconciliation Week, entitled *Reconciliation: the Next Step?*, held in the theatre of the Central City Library and open to the public. Mia Leigh was one of the panellists, speaking from the perspective of a more recent immigrant to Australia.

6 June: Michaela Easton represented BWCP as a respondent at an event at the Multi-Faith Centre, Griffith University, to commemorate Reconciliation Week.

20 June: Continuing book club discussion of *A History of God* by Karen Armstrong.

Member profiles



Margaret Rebgetz

I was born and raised in an Irish Catholic family and inducted into the Church's teachings and rituals. The stability of faith and family life provided me with a security to seek truth and fulfillment in various ways with life's journey taking different directions and my world view broadened.

During thirteen years in the Presentation Sisters my spirituality was nurtured whilst I taught in primary schools for a few years. My search for the soul led me into the study of psychology. In my work as a psychologist I have come to understand more about what it means to be human and the destructiveness that anger, hatred and closed-mindedness has on the mind and spirit of individuals and communities. In more recent years I have experienced an awakening to the need to become more involved in thinking about and responding to social injustices at home and abroad.

It has been on this journey in seeking ways to work towards justice and peace that led me to Believing Women for a Culture of Peace where it has been a privilege for me to meet wonderful women from various traditions, learn more about their faith and to participate in some activities which have been prayerful and peace making.



Mojgan Vafaei

My birthplace was Iran and I came to Australia three years ago. My multicultural journey started when I first met up with people in the church near where I live. I had not had any opportunity before to mix with people from different backgrounds and have a chance to understand their values and ideas. From time to time I went there and tried to gain more knowledge, make friendships and open my mind.

Two years ago I was at a Buddha festival at South Bank. While I was watching the stage I had a short conversation with a lady beside me, who was surprised to see me there. We exchanged phone numbers. That day for me was an introduction to knowing and becoming involved with a few multicultural groups, activities, information, books and, of course, lots of discussions and questions.

Soon after this I attended the first meeting of Believing Women for a Culture of Peace and, thanks God, the group is growing every day. I enjoy being in this group, enriching myself, having so many lovely friends, open discussions, having a voice as women, and best of all respecting everybody just as they are. I believe that no matter who you are and what you believe (or even what you don't believe) you have a role to play as an individual to make the world a better place.

Website wisdom

For a very helpful and comprehensive overview of Buddhism in Australia consult www.buddhanet.org.au

Upcoming events

17 July: Visit to Hindu temple and sacred music concert, Mt Cotton Rd, Burbank.

18 July: Book club discussion of *Beyond Beijing: the Next Step for Women* by Joan Chittister, 27 Hooker St, Windsor.

24 July: BWCP thematic dialogue session on 'Environment/Creation', Justice Place, Woolloongabba.

13 August: First general meeting of BWCP Inc following incorporation; review of activities and forward planning.

Special announcement

On 29 June BWCP was granted incorporated status under the Queensland Government's Associations Incorporations Act 1981.

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