



THE INTERFAITH CENTRE
OF MELBOURNE

Annual Report
2018 -2019

This 2018-2019 annual report for The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne (ICM) has been prepared by the Director, Reverend Helen Summers, for the Annual General Meeting held on Friday January 31, 2020.

Venue:

**ICM Office, St Oswald's Church Centre
100 High Street, Glen Iris. VIC 3146**

Acknowledgement of First Peoples

Members of The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne acknowledge the peoples of the Kulin Nation, on whose unceded lands we conduct interfaith activities. We respectfully acknowledge their Ancestors and Elders, past and present. Members of The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct interfaith business.

Partners, Sponsors and Friends

As we move into our twentieth year of Interfaith programs, we wish to express our sincere appreciation to the many organisations who have worked with us and supported the ICM in various capacities and to the many friends who have generously given their personal and professional support, advice and expertise, over many years.

Aunty Joy Wandin Murphy AO
Aunty Helen Bnads
Uncle Ron Murray

Margaret Alexander
Suzanne Ali and the late Azizool Ali
AMAFHH Federation
Baha'i Community of Melbourne
The Late Marianne Baillieu
Ian Baxter
Bendigo Bank, East Malvern
Bentleigh Uniting Church
Board of Imams, Victoria
Dr Calvin Bowman
Brahma Kumaris Spiritual University
Buddhist Council of Victoria
Ayesha Bux
Prof Des Cahill, OAM
Sister Silvia Campo, R.S.M.
Rev Chris Caudle
Ven Chi Kwang Sunim
City of Melbourne
Dr Nicholas Coleman and Family
Cath Connelly
Rev Patrick Carroll
Rev Dr Kim Cunio
Dr Joan Daw
Department of Premier and Cabinet, DPC
Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission
Rev CiCi Edwards-Jensen
Ramzi El Sayed
Elizabeth Exintaris
Imam Mohamad Fachni
Faith Communities Council of Victoria, FCCV
Federation Square
Fo Guang Shan Melbourne and Buddha's Light International Association of Victoria
Rev Jennifer Greenham
Rev'd Julie Hall
Valerie Hall
Hindu Council of Australia

Bishop Philip Huggins
Innersky Productions
Islamic Council of Victoria
Jewish Community Council of Victoria, JCCV
Jewish, Christian Muslim Council of Victoria, JCMA
David Jones, musician
Justice Connect
Rabbi Jonathan Keren Black
Rev Josephine Kerestes
Cantor Michel Laloum
Heather Lee
Rev'd Glenn Loughrey
Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion, MASC
National Council of Churches Australia, NCCA
Osmium Pty Ltd
Rev Chris Parnell
Brett Parris
Rev Jenne Perlstein
RMIT Chaplaincy
RMIT Student Well-being and Inclusion
Saara Sabbagh
Dr Visier Sanyu
Marian Scarlett
Nur Shkempi
Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria
St Oswald's Anglican Church
Kirtan Swamy
Pavan Swamy
The Sufi Movement in Australia
Tibetan Buddhist Society
Anita Tolley
Victorian Council of Churches, VCC
Vedanta Centre of Melbourne
Victorian Multicultural Commission, VMC
Carmen Warrington
Reimena Yee

Personal Note:

I wish to thank all of the Board Members and volunteers who have supported and contributed great work over the past 22 years since my interfaith ministry began in Melbourne in 1998, often under challenging circumstances.

Aunty Helen Bnads

Our very first event together was held at the Augustine Centre, Hawthorn, a four-part series: *Aboriginal History and Culture*. Aunty Helen was a Board member for many years and then a constant supporter and contributor.

Nur Shkembi

Nur worked with me into the early hours in our city office, as a member of the Arts and Culture Committee, Melbourne Parliament of the World's Religions in 2009: *Sacred Music Concert* and five art exhibitions plus performances. We worked together for a huge event: *Gala Evening with Cat Stevens* in the Great Hall of the National Gallery of Victoria and during the exhibition: *Breaking the Veils: Women Artists from the Islamic World* which we imported from the National Gallery of Jordan in 2006 for exhibitions in Melbourne and Shepparton.

Dr Nicholas Coleman

Nicholas' academic knowledge of world religions is extensive. He often took up the role as a moderator or emcee for interfaith dialogues. Nick was Deputy-Director of the ICM for many years and supported the many programs and events we created and produced. His contribution to the ICM winning First Prize of the 2018 King Abdullah World Interfaith Harmony Week event: *Who and Where Are We in a Changing World?* was invaluable and in addition, Nick chose the title.

Ian Baxter

Ian has been our Honorary Accountant, looking after the books of the ICM since about 2006 - we have lost the count of years. Ian has completed the BAS every three months, checked our Acquittals of grants and assisted with projected costs for grant applications. We are indebted to him for his kind, generous and meticulous work.

Many more pages are needed to thank all of the past board members and volunteers, so names will need to suffice - I hope I have not missed anyone.

- Rev Helen Summers OAM

Director's Report

Relocation: Office of The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne

The ICM office, 4th Floor, Causeway House, 306 Little Collins Street, Melbourne, had to be relocated by June 30 due to the landlord, Act for Peace, (International Aid Organisation of the NCCA) selling the 4th Floor.

An office was found in the Assembly Hall Building next to Scots Church in Collins Street, however, two days before the move, the Presbyterian committee, which approves all tenancies, declined the ICM as a tenant. There was a theological problem: "*the committee members believe in only one religion and the ICM works with people of diverse faith traditions.*" In the emergency to vacate the 4th floor, the ICM moved to the 5th Floor of Causeway House, an office with higher rent until the end of January 2019.

In early 2019, Revered Glenn Loughrey, St Oswald's Anglican Church, 100 High Street, Glen Iris, offered shared office space in the Church Centre. In addition, the Chapel would be available to hold interspiritual services and the large hall for events and labyrinth walking. On February 9th, 2019, the ICM office was relocated to the Church Centre, St Oswald's.

Recognition of the ICM

Council for Chaplains in Tertiary Institutions (CCTI)

The ICM is recognised by the CCTI as the faith body for Interfaith Ministers who may be called as Chaplains to serve in tertiary institutions. Rev Helen Summers as Director of the ICM attends CCTI Council meetings.

Rev Helen Summers is a Chaplain with RMIT University Chaplaincy, based at RMIT Brunswick for one day per week during semester time. Rev Chris Parnell served as a Chaplain with La Trobe University Chaplaincy, Shepparton, until June 13, 2019 when he resigned due to severe loss of hearing.

Chaplaincy at RMIT Brunswick

Rev Helen Summers continues to attend RMIT on Wednesdays in semester time as Interfaith Chaplain. Following the Christchurch Massacre on March 15, 2019, Helen organised an Interfaith Vigil, held outside on the lawn, with invited religious leaders participating. Over 200 hundred students and staff attended and many wrote in a Condolence Book to be sent to Al Noor Mosque in Christchurch. Helen was able to give the Condolence Book to the Imam when he visited Melbourne. Following the Sri Lanka massacres on Easter Sunday, Helen organised an outdoor Memorial at Brunswick. Again religious leaders were invited and over 100 students and staff attended.

A grass Chartres style labyrinth was created in late 2017 by Rev Helen Summers with experts, Lorraine and Geoff Rodda, using white landscaping chalk at RMIT Brunswick.

Introductory Labyrinth Walks were offered to staff and students. Feedback was very positive, however frequent remarking of the pathway, where birds had scratched out lines, became costly, so a portable canvas labyrinth was used for Walking the Labyrinth sessions in The Hangar, a large event space.

Rev Helen Summers attended a Chaplaincy Planning Day at the City Campus and a Welcome Dinner for International Students. RMIT Chaplaincy reports to the Centre for Wellbeing and Inclusion, based at RMIT University City Campus.

VCC-Emergencies Ministry

The ICM continues to be recognised as the faith body to register Interfaith Chaplains for VCC-Emergencies Ministry. Currently six Interfaith Ministers have completed training and are registered through The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne.

Supervision

As required now for all Ministers of Religion and Chaplains, Rev Helen Summers has received on-going supervision throughout 2019 and continues into 2020.

MAG Multifaith Advisory Group Treasury Place, Melbourne

The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne is recognised as a member of this important group and has been a member since 2009.

The Director continues to be one of the 25+ religious and community leaders who meet regularly and advise the Minister for Multicultural Affairs through the Chair of the Victorian Multicultural Commission. In 2018 - 2019 Helen Kapalos served as the Chair.

Meetings included:

- Meeting with the Premier, The Hon Daniel Andrews, in his office where he offered a grant of \$600,000 to faith organisations over three years.
- International Day of Peace, September 21, 2018, Prayer Ceremony at Zinc, Fed Square with Minister for Multicultural Affairs, The Hon Robin Scott, in support of drought afflicted farmers.
- Family Violence Working Group. Helen Summers attended.
- Community Education Program (Dowry related). Helen Summers attended
- Meetings to discuss media releases
- Issues affecting certain religious and cultural groups are discussed.
- MAG Workshop with Helen Kapalos and professional facilitators.
- Invitation to Minister Robin Scott's event at Melbourne Town Hall, Brett Parris attended.
- Invitation to Afternoon Tea with Minister Robin Scott at Ceres, Helen Summers attended.
- Five general meetings per year are scheduled.

ICM Events 2018-2019

Faith Formation Day August 20, 2018 **St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Kyneton** **Venue: Bentleigh East Uniting Church and Hall**

A request was received from the Vice-Principal at St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Kyneton, for 50 staff to attend a retreat day with an emphasis on Interfaith Prayer and walking meditation. Cath Connelly and Rev Helen Summers facilitated the day's activities. Walking the Labyrinth, prayers from diverse traditions, plus a talk and demonstration of Islamic Prayer was given by Sister Saara Sabbagh, Director, Benevolence Australia. Catering for morning tea and lunch.

Celebratory Dinner for The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne, November 21, 2018 **Portico Room and Balcony, Melbourne Town Hall** **Celtic Harp performed by Cath Connelly**

The Celebration was held to thank the religious and spiritual leaders who took part in our award winning event for the 2018 UN World Interfaith Harmony Week: *Who and Where Are We In A Changing World? How creation stories give meaning to life* held at Deakin Edge, Federation Square on 24th February. In March, it was announced that The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne had been awarded First Prize of the King Abdullah World Interfaith Harmony Week Prize for 2018. A trip to Jordan followed in April to receive the Prize from His Majesty King Abdullah 11.

The Ambassador for Jordan, His Excellency Ali Kraishan, was invited to attend the Dinner. After His Excellency's speech, he kindly gave each guest a copy of The Amman Message. An audio recording was played for the guests of H.M. King Abdullah 11's speech on receiving The Templeton Prize on November 13, at Washington National Cathedral, for His Majesty's interfaith and religious work over many years.

ICM Strategic Planning Workshop, January 19, 2019

Rev Chris Caudle very kindly led the one-day workshop with the following board members attending: Rev CiCi Edwards-Jensen, Rev Jo Kerestes, Brett Parris, Ayesha Bux and Rev Helen Summers.

Five goal and purpose statements were drawn out of the day's discussions and activities. Each statement was allocated to a board member for further work. We are extremely grateful to Rev Chris Caudle for his excellent leadership in Strategic Planning.

Parliament of the World's Religions International Webinar, February 11, 2019

Rev Helen Summers was invited to participate in a webinar about winning First Place for the 2018 UN World Interfaith Harmony Week. Helen invited Rabbi Jonathan Black and Swami Sunishthananda, Vedanta Centre of Melbourne, who were participants in the winning event,

Who and Where Are We in a Changing World? to participate in the webinar. The first part was recorded on January 30 by Mark Proctor, Innersky Productions, at the Community Seminar Room, Bendigo Bank, East Malvern. The second part went live on February 11 and can be viewed on the ICM website and the PWR Website.

UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, February 17, 2019
The ICM's 9th Annual WIHW event. St Oswald's Anglican Church, Glen Iris
Listening to the Statement from the Heart

Aunty Helen Bnads and Rev'd Glenn Loughrey, spoke from Aboriginal perspectives. Religious and Spiritual representatives spoke about what their communities are doing, or will do, to educate their communities about the true history of Australia and the First Peoples, the oldest continuing culture in the world. Calvin Bowman, Organist, and Megan Kenny, Flautist, provided beautiful music.

Vaisakhi Day, April 27, 2019
Federation Square, Melbourne.

Produced by the ICM for the Sikh Interfaith Council. Religious leaders offered congratulations to the Sikhs and read texts from their traditions which honour the same values as those of the founder, Guru Nanak.

World Labyrinth Day, May 4, 2019
Excursion to Elgee Park with Shia Muslim Group

Luncheon and Walking the beautiful labyrinth at Elgee Park, private farm, Mornington Peninsula. Mr Baillieu Myer with Mrs Sarah Myer, and the guests, all shared family histories and cultural backgrounds and enjoyed learning about the similarities and how often people convert from one religious tradition to another. A very interesting day for all.

Interfaith Prayer Ceremony for Peace and Understanding
Buddha's Day and Multicultural Festival, Federation Square, May 19, 2019
Fo Guang Shan Monastery and Buddha's Light International Victoria (BLIAV)

11th Annual Interfaith event produced by Rev Helen Summers. Religious leaders plus Interfaith Ministers: Rev Helen Summers and Rev Josephine Kerestes participated, with Uncle Ron Murray who performed the didgeridoo and gave the Acknowledgement of Country. This annual Festival draws many thousands of people to Fed Square over a weekend. The Interfaith Ceremony starts with a procession, led by the Venerables of Fo Guang Shan, to a special Buddha's Stage in the centre of Fed Square. When the didgeridoo sounds, people stop, and silently watch and listen, as each religious and

spiritual leader offers a prayer or a chant. The effect of this robed gathering of specially invited leaders has a beautiful, powerful energy, which affects the audience profoundly.

Women of Vision Workshop, June 8-9, 2019

Brahma Kumaris Spiritual Retreat Centre, Frankston South.

Two-year program.

The two-day overnight retreat was funded by a \$25,000 grant from the Department of Premier and Cabinet through the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC). Peninsula Health sponsored places and accommodation for the Aboriginal women who attended. Women from diverse religions and cultures made up a total of 40.

The program was developed by Rev Helen Summers with assistance from Aunty Helen Bnads (Peninsula Health) and Batul Gulani (AMAFHH).

Volunteers for the Retreat were: Rev CiCi Edwards-Jensen, Ayesha Bux and Margaret Alexander. Sister Jacqueline Russell, Brahma Kumaris Spiritual University, assisted. The workshop was evaluated highly by the women who participated.

Caulfield Grammar School, Wheeler's Hill. Year 10 students. June 18, 2019.

Interfaith Excursion. The Hub, Docklands, Melbourne.

The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne was asked to organise this event by a teacher at Caulfield Grammar.

Ayesha Bux led the interfaith experience. The Golden Rule was shared and stories told about the Jewish, Christian and Muslim Women's Joint Journey to Jerusalem in 2019.

Advisory Role of the ICM

- Enquiries about interfaith marriages continue to come to the ICM
- Community leaders who are organising interfaith events request advice/assistance and partnerships: Buddha's Day, Vaisakhi Day, Forums, Gift of Life Forum
- Vision Australia Radio Station, Jason Gipps, invited Helen Summers to visit the studios in Kooyong and requested information about interfaith events to broadcast to their listeners, April 9, 2019
- Principal Chaplain, Director General Collin Acton, Royal Australian Navy, made appointment with Rev Helen Summers at ICM office for advice about Interfaith Prayers and Services, on visit to Melbourne. Navy has many people in their ranks from diverse religions and cultures. April 12, 2019

Invitations to Speak: Rev Helen Summers

- AMAFHH International Women's Day, March 8, 2019
- AMAFHH Multicultural Fair, March 13, 2019
- Reconciliation Forum, for Vedanta Centre of Melbourne, April 6, 2019

Interfaith/Community events attended

- NAIDOC Frankston Hospital, Peninsula Health
- Collins Street Precinct events
- Higgins Community Service Awards, Malvern Town Hall
- Brahma Kumaris: Sister Shivani Visit
- SalamFest, Kensington Town Hall
- Soroptimists, Brighton
- Intercultural Society of Victoria: *Teens and Spiritualities*
- Islamic Council of Victoria, Annual Dinner, Melrose Receptions, November 18, 2018
- Premier's Multicultural Gala Dinner, Melbourne Convention Centre, March 16, 2019
- Vigil for Christchurch, Organised by the Islamic Council of Victoria, State Library of Victoria. March 18, 2019
- Manningham Interfaith Network Dinner, March 23, 2019
- *The Making of Nivedita*, theatrical production. Vedanta Centre of Melbourne. May 11, 2019
- Celtic and Aboriginal Spirituality, John Bell, Iona Community and Rev'd Glenn Loughrey, Anglican Priest, St Oswald's Church, May 12, 2019

Iftar Invitations 2019

- AMAFHH Iftar, Laila Reception, May 18, 2019
- Board of Imams Iftar, Aurora Reception, May 19, 2019
- RMIT University Vice-Chancellor's Iftar, May 22, 2019
- Premier's Iftar, Grand Hyatt Hotel, May 30, 2019
- SalamFest Iftar, ICV, May 31, 2019

Workshops /Conferences Attended

- Mental Health First Aid, 2 days, Wellspring Ashburton
- Medianet Masterclass, RACV Club, Melbourne.
- Visitation of Pontifical Council, 2 days, Catholic Leadership Centre, Melbourne. September 22-23, 2018
- Courts Engagement Day, attended by Rev CiCi Edwards Jensen, October 19, 2018
- Round Table on *Freedom of Religion and Belief*, VEOHRC, June 27, 2019
- **International Conference on Cohesive Societies (ICCS) Conference, June 19-21, 2019. S.Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.** Rev Helen Summers was invited to attend. Her Excellency Halimah Yacob, President of Singapore, opened the Conference. H.M. King Abdullah 11 of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was the Keynote Speaker. Distinguished speakers included: Ms Karen Armstrong, Bishop Miguel Angel Ayuso Guixot, Venerable Cuo Huei, Lord John Alderdice and Dr Ali Al Nuaimi. A Community Experience Program was offered to participants to learn more about Singapore's multicultural and multifaith society.

- Rev Helen Summers OAM
27 January, 2020