

Engaging beyond differences: new understandings, perspectives and hopes

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Misunderstanding, fear and mistrust have characterized relations between Islam and the West in the post-September 11 era, not only regionally and globally, but also locally. These attitudes are often based upon ignorance of differing religious and cultural beliefs and understandings, and a lack of personal engagement with members of these cultures and religious communities. This is true, even in societies proud of their multicultural character, such as Australia.

➤ *Fear of the other:*

As a result, members of the various religious traditions (and non-religious people too) are often strangers to each other. And throughout history the stranger has often been marginalized because they have been seen as the “other”, not part of the dominant community and excluded. Pohl makes this point quite strongly:

A very potent way to exclude strangers from even the most basic provision and safety, not to mention our homes, is to focus on their difference and exaggerate their strangeness. Nazi forces made Jews into strangers by wildly exaggerating their “otherness”. The logic of ethnic cleansing depends on seeing another culture or community as totally other and alien. The current hostile rhetoric about immigrants and refugees portrays strangers as dangerous and other. (1)

This willingness to characterize the stranger as the “other” has no doubt been a significant factor in recent social conflict in Australia, such as the Cronulla riots in 2005, and the vehement reaction against a proposed Muslim school in Camden, NSW in 2008.

Regionally, problems related to the Muslim insurgencies in the Philippines, Muslim/Buddhist tensions in southern Thailand, the animosity between China and Tibet, and even intra-Islamic rivalries in Indonesia are fanned at least partly by the tendency to treat the stranger as “other”.

And on the global level there can be no doubt that misunderstanding, fear and mistrust of the “other” are central to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and motivating factors in the

publishing of, and reaction to the anti-Muslim cartoons in Denmark and the Dutch movie *Fitna*, which criticized the Quran.

One of the first casualties in these and similar situations is recognition of and respect for our shared humanity. This shared humanity is the ground upon which greater understanding, security and trust can be sought together. In this year of the 60th anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* we do well to recall that the human dignity of all persons, enshrined and protected in human rights, constitutes a common meeting place in which to seek dialogue, greater mutual understanding

Dialogue across religious traditions and their associated cultures requires a willingness to move beyond differences by creating places and structures where the human dignity of each person will be recognized and celebrated, and the hard work of dialogue will be undertaken from a standpoint of mutual respect and trust:

*In the midst of all the violence and corruption of the world,
God invites us today to create new places of belonging,
places of sharing, of peace and of kindness,
places where no-one needs to defend himself or herself;
places where each one is loved and accepted with one's own fragility, abilities
and disabilities. (2)*

- Respecting the other: hospitality as a central precept of the three monotheistic religions:

In each of the three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Abraham is honoured as the great father in faith and friend of God. In the Scriptures of all three Abraham is portrayed as an exemplar of hospitality, who welcomed sojourners and strangers (e.g. Gen 9; Heb 13:2; Quran 11:69 ff)

In the Jewish Tanakh, the experience of slavery and then being wanderers and strangers was etched deep in the Hebrew psyche and served as a call for them to practice hospitality and generous compassion, especially to the widow, the orphan and *'the stranger in your midst'* (e.g. Lev 19:34; Deut 10:19, 24:17-22)

For Christians, the practice of hospitality - especially to the stranger or the outsider - becomes welcome and hospitality offered to Christ (Mt 25), and in an allusion to Abraham's welcome the Letter to the Hebrews exhorts Christians, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it". (Heb 13:2)

The Holy Quran offers a similar message, placing the stranger alongside parents and kinsfolk in an admonition to kindness: "... and do good - to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet) and what your right hand possesses ..." (Quran 4:36)

These strong statements of the importance of hospitality in the three great monotheistic religions are relevant not only for the peoples of the past, but also – perhaps even more – for us who live at the beginning of the 21st century. While Broyde-Sharone’s insight below has a specific Muslim/non-Muslim focus, it could well apply to all initiatives which seek to engage people *beyond differences*:

... in our minds we have created a separation between the Muslim and the non-Muslim communities. The antidote to that separation, I am convinced, is hospitality, our willingness to welcome the stranger and our willingness to be the stranger. (3)

Since 9/11 governments, educational authorities, religious and local communities have worked with renewed vigour at fostering and facilitating interfaith/intercultural dialogue. The emphasis, however, is often on exchange of information and perspectives in large presentations, sometimes with much talking but limited opportunity for reflection, and limited engagement between the participants.

In the remainder of this paper we will examine some of the implications of adopting the concept of hospitality as a paradigm for interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Already it is clear that genuine hospitality is built upon mutuality and the recognition and respect of our shared humanity, such that

In hospitality, the stranger is welcomed into a safe, personal, and comfortable place, a place of respect and acceptance and friendship. Even if only briefly, the stranger is included in a life-giving and life-sustaining network of relations. Such welcome involves attentive listening and mutual sharing of lives and life stories. It requires an openness of heart, a willingness to make one’s life visible to others, and a generosity of time and resources. (4)

A number of case studies of engagement beyond differences between Muslims, Buddhists and Christians are offered for consideration. These initiatives have been structured upon an alternative model of interfaith/intercultural engagement which involves the creation of safe, welcoming spaces where conversation and reflection make real respect for human dignity, empathetic listening with mind and heart, and a willingness to work towards the common good.

- *Engaging with the other: how to address fear and facilitate transformative engagement:*

Interfaith and intercultural dialogue can be quite a daunting activity for people to engage in, since it requires a willingness to be with and engage with ‘others’ whose appearance, lifestyle and practices may be quite different to our own. Participants can experience anxiety about what will be asked of them, and what conflict might emerge in the discussions.

For this reason, it is essential that *safe, respectful spaces* be created, where interfaith and intercultural dialogue can take place. Wherever these places are, they must provide an ambience of welcome where participants will feel it is possible for them to speak their truth with integrity and without attack, in a context of openness and mutual respect.

Within acts of hospitality, needs are met, but hospitality is truncated if it does not go beyond physical needs. Part of hospitality includes recognizing and valuing the stranger or guest. (5)

In the interfaith/intercultural dialogue facilitated by Australian Catholic University's Institute for Advancing Community Engagement, care has been taken to attend to both the physical setting, and a clear articulation of the invitation to openness, mutual respect and the shared task of creating and maintaining a sense that it will be safe for participants to engage together within this space. This is the practical expression of hospitality:

By definition, hospitality involves some space into which people are welcomed, a place where unless the invitation is given, the stranger would not feel free to enter. (6)

This practice of hospitality serves to challenge the prevailing negative and excluding public opinion about 'strangers' and difference. By inviting, welcoming and including, IACE's process is countercultural and once again affirms the centrality of recognizing and respecting the human dignity of all.

Especially when the larger society disregards or dishonors certain persons, small acts of respect and welcome are potent far beyond themselves. They point to a different system of valuing and an alternate model of relationships. (7)

In all of this, the desired outcome is what we have called *transformative engagement*. We do not seek to get people talking just for the sake of talking. Our purpose is to assist participants to engage with each other, face-to-face, in order that they may be changed – transformed – and from that experience recognize and act upon their own capacity to become agents of change, acting to facilitate transformation in the relationships, institutions and communities they are part of.

Transformative engagement is built upon, and in turn fosters an attitude of genuine and attentive listening to the other. By hearing and appreciating each other's stories, people are better able to understand and respect the differences between them and better equipped to move beyond the differences, to name common values, hopes and aspirations and to explore avenues for transformative action both individually and together.

Quiet and reflection are essential components of transformative engagement. Far too often people react impulsively in conversations and discussions; often they hear words but don't grasp meaning or understand nuances. Rather than reaction, transformative engagement calls for moments of quiet and reflection, in order to process information or allow wisdom to percolate, before a response is offered.

Some participants find this reflective component of transformative engagement initially disconcerting. Being time-poor, they may not build quiet times for reflection into their day, so that any time of quiet reflection may be not only unfamiliar but uncomfortable. However, the feedback from participants almost always refers to the reflective element of the engagement. It seems they quickly respond to the invitation to reflect, and many of them speak of how valuable they found this element of the process as they became more practiced in it.

Transformative engagement in interfaith and intercultural dialogue begins at the level of the person, but it inevitably leads to a wider engagement with other people and social institutions in the pursuit of the common good. Our shared humanity and the recognition of the dignity of each person compel people of faith to take their faith into the marketplace and seek change that will contribute to the common good:

Respect for the rights and well-being of each individual is the place where religious faith and a commitment to political liberty have their closest connection. A philosophy based on this principle has the most potential to bring people from opposing viewpoints together because it excludes no one and yet demands from everyone full consideration of the ideas and needs of others. (8)

Appendix A diagrammatically sets out the model of transformative engagement.

➤ *Engaging with the other: case studies*

There have been a number of initiatives undertaken by Australian Catholic University's Institute for Advancing Community Engagement in its *Beyond Differences* agenda which were based upon this model of transformative engagement.

(1) Reflective workshop for South Thailand delegation

In 2007 IACE was invited to host a visiting delegation from Southern Thailand for one day, as part of longer visit to Australia. The delegates were from higher education institutes and government in Pattani, southern Thailand. All but one were Muslims.

Pattani is a largely Muslim community situated at the southern extremity of a country which is predominantly Buddhist. There have been ongoing tensions between the two communities and in recent times violent conflict has erupted, and there has been much death and destruction.

IACE's goal was to structure an activity intended to help the delegation reflect on the situation in Pattani and to explore alternative possibilities for conflict resolution through transformative engagement.

The day began with a meeting with representatives of the Islamic Council of New South Wales and a visit to Rassalah College, an Islamic school in Lakemba, in Sydney.

This meeting allowed the delegation to hear about the current situation of Muslims in Sydney, and to learn of the difficulties the Islamic community has had in establishing itself and finding its identity in multicultural Australia. The members of the delegation shared their own experience in Pattani and were able to ask questions and explore possible action with the representatives of the Islamic Council of NSW.

Leaving Rissalah, the delegation made its way to the university's campus where a small group comprising ACU National students, staff from the university's Mission Engagement Unit and Indigenous Education Unit, staff from the Columban Mission Institute's Christian/Muslim Relations Centre, and representatives of Affinity Intercultural Foundation had gathered to greet them.

After formal Acknowledgement of Country, and Acknowledgement of Spiritual Traditions the group listened to a presentation on the historical experience of Australia's Indigenous people as a minority group within a largely indifferent dominant society. After this presentation, participants were asked to sit quietly, reflect on what they had heard and then write down anything which had struck a chord for them. They were then invited to share their reflections with one or two others close by.

There is a pattern of process emerging here: attentive listening in order to hear the story of another; reflection on that story and connecting it with my own experience; engaging face-to-face with others and seeking both common and divergent understandings in a mutually respectful dialogue.

When a member of the Pattani delegation spoke of their reality in southern Thailand, the pattern was repeated: attentive listening, reflection and mutually respectful face-to-face dialogue. After lunch the group regathered, and participants were again invited into quiet reflection around the questions of "what can learn from each other's experience and reality?" and "what are some possible ways forward to take us beyond differences towards a more hopeful future?" The reflective time allowed participants time to recall, analyse, wonder, and creatively explore possible future actions for resolving and avoiding conflict, each in his/her own context as well as in the wider community.

Only after the reflection did the group break into two smaller groups to discuss their responses together. Later both groups rejoined to feed back some of their discussion to the whole group.

The process upon which the dialogue was structured helped participants to become familiar with each other and to dispel some of their misunderstandings, fear and mistrust they may have been carrying. Although the subject matter of this meeting was serious, often there was laughter, and once or twice tears were shed as the telling of a story awoke empathy in the mind and heart of another. This was a safe space where people could engage with each other not as 'strangers' but as real human beings.

There are limits to what can be achieved in one day with a diverse group of people. However, it is clear from the feedback from the participants in this initiative that

hospitality created a safe, respectful space where transformative engagement could occur through attentive listening and genuine dialogue. Each person expressed appreciation for the opportunity to participate, and while no definitive resolutions were reached, many spoke of leaving the meeting with much greater understanding, a renewed sense of hope for the future and a desire to seek for ways to continue to move beyond differences.

(2) Young Muslim Leadership program

In both 2007 and 2008, the Institute for Advancing Community Engagement collaborated with La Trobe University's Centre for Dialogue in presenting a Young Muslim Leadership Program. Each year there were about 20 participants, who were young adult Muslims, some university students and some in employment, who had or aspired to leadership roles in the Islamic community. All were from Melbourne. Prior to coming on the Sydney visit, they had attended a number of lectures and discussions organized by the Centre for Dialogue.

IACE's contribution to the project was the planning and facilitation of a 4-day program in Sydney, with a focus on faith-based leadership. The program was designed to help the participants explore the tensions often expressed about being "authentically Muslim and authentically Australian" (whatever those terms may mean), and to seek their own synthesis as they developed their skills and vision for leadership.

As part of IACE's *Beyond Differences* agenda, the Young Muslim Leadership program was developed with an aim of providing the young leaders with opportunities to engage with accomplished leaders from both within and beyond the Islamic community.

In this program transformative engagement within the safe space created by the program and its process would equip and inspire the young leaders to come to see themselves as agents for positive change in their communities, as well as provide them with some time to actually develop a plan for transformative action.

Sessions were designed so that on most occasions some quality input was provided by high profile leaders from both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities – people such as a female member of the Islamic Council of New South Wales, a Catholic bishop, a national TV current affairs presenter, and an imam with a passion for community engagement. One session included a rotational engagement with two young Muslim leaders and two young non-Muslim leaders who offered their insights and fielded questions from the participants. Input was always followed by questions, and when time permitted, informal conversations in pairs or trios.

For some sessions, where a significant block of time had been set aside for discussions participants were first asked to spend some time in quiet reflection and then to jot down some thoughts prior to the discussion. Many at first found this unusual and uncomfortable, but as the time went on they became more at ease with it; many commented on how it had changed the way they would approach discussions.

Once again the reader will see a pattern of process emerging here: attentive listening in order to know and understand; reflection and connecting with my own experience; engaging face-to-face with others and seeking both common and divergent understandings in a mutually respectful dialogue.

At the end of each day, an evaluation took place. Participants were asked to complete an evaluation form, but before the forms were given out they were asked to sit together in the quiet and reflect upon what they had learnt that day, what was some insights they'd gained that they wanted to hold on to, and what questions had emerged for the from the day. Only after the reflection did they complete the evaluation.

Hospitality was central to the Young Muslim Leadership Program. From the moment of their arrival, the young leaders were welcomed warmly and invited to practice a similar welcome towards each other, in recognition of their shared humanity, and the dignity of each person. Hospitality was modeled by the facilitators in the welcome accorded to visiting presenters, and the respectful way in which discussions, feedback and Q&A sessions were conducted.

The participants experienced hospitality which was conducive to transformative engagement when they were welcomed into other safe spaces, such as the Reconciliation Church, home to the Sydney Aboriginal Catholic Ministry at La Perouse, and the Gallipoli Mosque at Auburn. Transformative engagement was also facilitated in the safe space and warm welcome of dinners hosted by the Soka Gakkai International (Buddhist) and Affinity Intercultural Foundation (Muslim).

Finally, but absolutely central to the success of the Young Muslim Leadership program, was the homestay component. All the young leaders were accommodated in non-Muslim homes – either private residences or convents or religious houses of Catholic Brothers - for the duration of their stay. For many of them it was the first time they had ever stayed over in a non-Muslim home, and initially some of them were quite concerned. Here indeed was the need for safe spaces, and much effort was invested in allaying fears and assuring the young people that they were both safe and welcome there. This highlights the wisdom in Pohl's view, that

It is important to look at specific settings for hospitality because welcome is always offered from within a "place" that combines physical space, social relationships, and particular meanings and values. Making a place for hospitality is not only about creating or transforming a physical environment to make room for a few extra people. The human relationships and commitments that shape the setting affect whether it is or is not welcoming. (9)

The evaluations rate the homestay component as a highlight of the program, and many of the guests spoke of how this experience had changed their views and understandings of non-Muslims. Importantly, the comments of most of the homestay hosts indicate that they were similarly enriched by their interactions with their visitors. Again transformation occurred, this time in the safe spaces created by hospitality in people's homes. No doubt

this experience will shape the attitudes and actions of these young people when they return to the communities where they will exercise leadership.

In the case of both the south Thai delegation and the Young Muslim Leadership Program, people moved from being most aware of 'otherness' towards a strong awareness and embrace of solidarity, in virtue of our common humanity and our identity as people of faith. Commonalities came to be emphasized above difference as people became more familiar with one another, and no longer were strangers to each other.

(3) *Meeting World Religions Face-to-face*

The final case study we wish to present in this paper is one drawn from the context of teaching and learning. It represents an attempt to embed Australian Catholic University's strategic focus on community engagement into the teaching and learning process.

The School of Theology offers a unit titled *World Religions*. It is available to students in a variety of courses, including teaching, theology and social work, and is intended to give students a broad introduction to the beliefs, practices and ethics of five world religions other than Christianity, including Australian Indigenous spirituality.

When it had been offered previously the unit had much the same format as others (2 hour lecture, 1 hour tutorial each week) although the lecturer-in-charge had invited representatives from the religious traditions being studied to come in and present a lecture. There had also been visits to a synagogue and a mosque.

While these initiatives allowed students an opportunity to gain relevant information from a practitioner of each religion, and to ask some questions, they did not really provide any structured opportunity for the students to engage with them face-to-face, in ways which could change them either intellectually or attitudinally.

In 2008 the lecturer-in Charge and a member the IACE staff developed a proposal for an initiative which would enhance the learning of the students by personal engagement. A grant application was prepared and eventually half the amount of funding requested was received to support the program.

As in past years, the lectures given by visiting representatives of the faith traditions occurred again in 2008, and visits to the synagogue and mosque were scheduled. The major innovations emerged as a result of the *Meeting World Religions Face-to-face* initiative. The first occurred in week 2 of the semester (second meeting of the unit) when a representative of each of the faith traditions joined a panel and spoke to the class about "what it means for me to be a Muslim (or Jew or ..)" and "what it's like for me to be a Muslim (or Jew or ..) in Sydney in 2008".

After each presenter spoke for about ten minutes, the students were asked to remain quiet, reflect on what they had heard and then to jot down some responses they had to it. When all the visiting lecturers had spoken, the students were invited to ask questions or make

observations after having reflectively considered what had been presented. The ensuing questions were intelligent and insightful.

The second innovation came in week 11, when the whole three hour block was given over to a *Meeting World Religions Face-to-face* Forum. For the Forum, each faith tradition's representative was asked to bring along a young adult member of their community also. Unfortunately not all the traditions were able to manage this but those who did found an even greater level of engagement with the students, who felt very comfortable interacting with someone closer to their own age, who 'spoke their language' – once again affirming the value of recognising our shared humanity.

The students were asked to prepare beforehand questions they wanted to ask the representatives of the faith traditions. At the Forum, each faith tradition was seated at a separate table. The students formed themselves into small groups which over the course of the morning rotated from one table to another. Each group had about 20 minutes to sit face-to-face with the representatives of each faith tradition. In this time they could ask questions, share experiences and even begin to develop contacts and friendships.

When each group had visited each faith tradition, the class regathered as a whole and everyone was invited to reflect quietly on what they had experienced and what they had learnt in the Forum and only after the reflection was there discussion.

The evaluations made it clear that for many of the students this was the first time they had encountered and engaged face-to-face with a Hindu (or Muslim or ...) and as a result they were hoping to develop a more positive approach when they confronted difference, or fear or mistrust of 'strangers'. Other comments suggested that students felt they understood some aspects of a faith tradition better because the explanation offered by the practitioner was much more comprehensible than information they had read.

Because of the format of the Forum, we needed a big open space, conducive to movement and multiple simultaneous conversations. Such a space was not available at the University during lecture weeks, and so we decided to spend some of the grant funding to hire a nearby hall which would meet our need. We mention this because the creation of safe, respectful places includes the physical demands of people for a welcoming, comfortable space where it is possible and easy to attend to others, and to the proceedings, rather than being continually distracted by uncomfortable surroundings.

The *Meeting World Religions Face-to-face* initiative was primarily directed at enhancing the learning outcomes of students and increasing their engagement in the learning process. While knowledge and understanding were central to it, so also were reflection and mutually respectful dialogue. The engagement which occurred gave students insight into the values of other faith traditions and hopefully triggered some consideration of their own values, and where there are commonalities in the value systems of the various faith traditions. In this it contributes to these students being knowledge-competent and attitudinally attuned to become agents of positive change in their present communities and in their future professional roles.

Our initial hope had been, amongst other things, to establish regular e-mail communication between the students and the representatives of the faith traditions, where questions could be asked freely and responses given, but for a number of reasons it was not possible. This would seem to be a valuable to consider in the future, in order to make the engagement offered to students even more effective.

Appendix B diagrammatically sets out the model adopted in the *Meeting World Religions Face-to-face* initiative.

➤ *Learning with and from each other:*

This paper has proposed hospitality and the creation of safe, respectful places for transformative engagement as one means of moving beyond differences, towards a more hopeful tomorrow. We have argued that initiatives which bring people together face-to-face and engage them in mutually respectful dialogue build upon our shared humanity and strengthen observance of the human dignity of each person.

The paper has outlined three examples where these principles have been applied in the structuring and planning of initiatives. The evaluation of these initiatives by those who participated affirm that they have been successful in bringing about transformative engagement in those involved, and equipping them to undertake transformative action in their wider communities. In this sense they are ‘good news’ stories at the local level.

The question now emerges, can such a model of transformative engagement be applied in the context of regional or global tension and conflict? How do we move forward regionally or globally in the face of misunderstanding, fear and mistrust? Are there examples to show that transformative engagement can be implemented successfully and sustained over time?

Reflecting on these questions, we think that principles similar to the principles of transformative engagement proposed here were at work in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, where attentive listening to personal and communal stories, mutually respectful engagement and rediscovery of common humanity served to lay the foundations for profound social change and healing after the era of apartheid. Undoubtedly, the Commission did not meet everyone’s hopes and expectations, and there was indeed significant opposition to its establishment, its operation and its outcomes. However, in spite of these limitations and some of the subsequent history of South Africa, it must be acknowledged that the Commission’s work wrought significant transformation in South African society and in the lives of many individuals.

Another area where transformative engagement appears to have been successful in some measure is the ecumenical movement among the various Churches of Christianity. From the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century until the middle of the twentieth century, relations between the Catholic church and other Christian churches were largely characterized by misunderstanding, fear and mistrust, if not outright hatred in some

quarters. Those who belonged to another denomination were often seen as the other, a stranger; mutual respect and recognition of common humanity were not on the agenda. However, at the Second Vatican Council the Catholic stance on inter-denominational dialogue became much more open and positive, no doubt influenced in part by the earlier formation of the World Council of Churches and an emerging desire for unity amongst some non-Catholic Christian churches.

The Second Vatican Council's *Decree on Ecumenism* became the charter for a new engagement between the Catholics and other Christians, laying down principles for the practice of ecumenism which bear strong resemblances to the principles we have enunciated for transformative engagement. (10) Sidoti states it clearly:

..... this very methodology was so successful in inter-denominational dialogue among Christians after Vatican II. As with the great gulf between Christians and Muslims today, there was a great gulf between Catholics and other Christians for centuries, based in the same way on ignorance and misunderstanding. The mutual learning through dialogue in safe spaces has revealed that what divides Christians is small and relatively unimportant compared with what unites us. It has contributed to a veritable revolution in intra-Christian relationships in recent decades. (11)

The experience of Australian Catholic University's Institute for Advancing Community Engagement suggests that a number of elements are key in its *Beyond Differences* agenda, especially

- Dialogue
- Structured teaching and learning initiatives
- Learning and engagement for transformation
- Common action in pursuit of shared goals

They offer a new way forward in the work of interfaith and intercultural dialogue, in pursuit of human dignity and the common good and the ground on which diverse people and groups can learn with and from each other.

No doubt there are other ways and other visions for interfaith and intercultural dialogue, some of which may be even more effective in bringing about positive social transformation and contributing to the common. What we offer here is one model that has worked in our Australian context. We don't know whether it can achieve similar outcomes in other contexts. For example, we wonder what applicability there is for this model in the Middle East or in the tension points of Asia? Given the religious beliefs and understandings of the various parties to the painful conflicts of the Middle East, we suspect that this model, with its strong advocacy of hospitality, has something to contribute to the search for peace in that part of the world.

Our hope is that others will take up our model and attempt to use it in their own contexts, reflect upon their experience and make improvement which will increase its effectiveness. We warmly invite feedback from anyone attempts to use the model in a specific situation.

➤ *Conclusion:*

While the world we live in is full of tension, conflict and many instances of injustice, there are many, many people, inspired by the different faith traditions, seeking to engage with their communities and social institutions to bring about social transformation. Wherever they work, they plant the seeds of hope for a better tomorrow. Motivated by a desire to see every person able to live a decent human life in dignity and peace, their practice of hospitality, mutuality and solidarity are powerful generators of hope, as Vanier affirms:

Hope for our world lies not in the manufacture of greater weapons or the implementation of more repressive laws; hope lies in our capacity to love and to forgive and in our desire to live reconciliation and to grow in love for our enemies. (12)

But lest this all sounds too pious, let's put it another way. The work and possibility of transformative engagement calls us to move beyond today and yesterday, to move beyond differences and to build a better tomorrow not just for ourselves, but for all men and women. As Broyde-Sharone succinctly sums it up,

... interfaith work is an art, not a science. It offers us a unique opportunity to confront our fear of strangers. The fears we cling to are based on both historical memory and trepidation of the unknown; the solution is not to pretend we don't have fears, but, on the contrary, to acknowledge them and then walk through them to the other side. (13)

Endnotes:

- (1) Pohl, C (1999) p. 97
- (2) Vanier, J. (2005) p. 12
- (3) Broyde-Sharone, R (2005) p. 19
- (4) Pohl, C op cit p. 13
- (5) *ibid* p. 31
- (6) *ibid* p. 39
- (7) *ibid* p. 61
- (8) Albright, M (2006) P. 289
- (9) Pohl, C op cit p.150
- (10) Second Vatican Council *Decree on Ecumenism* (1964) especially article 9
- (11) Sidoti, C (2008) personal communication to Anthony Steel
- (12) Vanier, J *op cit* p. 86
- (13) Broyde-Sharone, R *op cit* p. 19

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