**World Interfaith Harmony Week 2015**

**REPORT**

***One Planet, Many Faiths: Putting Peace into Practice*** was the title of this year’s World Interfaith Harmony Week event, held in Melbourne, Australia.

Over 100 religious and community leaders from fifteen religious and spiritual traditions, attended the Luncheon in Queen’s Hall, Parliament House, Melbourne, on February 5th, 2015.

The current cycle of violence and revenge in the world: in the Middle East, Nigeria, Paris, and closer to home in Sydney, together with the growing number of young Muslim men leaving Australia to fight with ISIL, has impacted our communities.

Islamophobia and anti-Semitism has been growing. The Sikh community has also been affected. Some Sikhs have suffered abuse by mistakenly being linked with the gunman who wore a turban and held 18 people hostage in Sydney in December, 2014.

The siege was treated as a terrorist attack by police.

This year more than ever, it was vitally important for religious representatives to gather together to speak out about the cycle of violence and revenge and to work together for understanding, respect and peace.

Four religious leaders were asked to prepare a five to seven minute talk about how our communities can work together in harmony. They were asked to give **at least one practical suggestion** from their tradition for all leaders to take home and actively put into practice.

The Speakers were: Rabbi Ralph Genende, Rabbinical Council of Victoria; Jasbir Singh Suropada, Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria; Sr. Saara Sabbagh, Islamic Council of Victoria and Bishop Philip Huggins, Anglican Diocese of Melbourne.

Reverend Helen Summers, The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne, introduced the topic and spoke of the need to practice the shared commandments that are at the heart of the World Interfaith Harmony Week: Love of God and Love of the Neighbour or Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbour. Dr Nicholas Coleman, The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne, was the Moderator and summed up the event.

The Speakers were videotaped. The recording was uploaded on to The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne’s website and copies of the DVD were sent to the following organizations for their websites and newsletters which are circulated at different times:

Faith Communities Council of Victoria

Islamic Council of Victoria

Jewish Community Council of Victoria

Rabbinical Council of Victoria (Rabbi Ralph Genende)

Victorian Council of Churches

Uniting Church of Australia: Unity Through Faiths

Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria

Anglican Diocese of Melbourne (Bishop Philip Huggins)

Benevolence Australia (Sr Saara Sabbagh)

Religions for Peace Australia

Feedback from the event has been very favourable.

Each organization has a large data base.

Example: Faith Communities Council of Victoria has a data base of 1500.

An article about the event appeared in The Australian Jewish News on Friday, February 20, 2015

The World Interfaith Harmony Week event was organized by the committee of The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne.

Several organizations contributed towards the cost of the food and venue for the Luncheon. The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne is a not for profit organization – all work is voluntary.

Reverend Helen Summers

Founder and Director

The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne