

# **Inter-religious Dialogue**

*On 6 May, at the synagogue Temple Sinai, the annual interfaith dinner brought together Christians, Jews and Muslims. The programme included statements about the principles of inter-religious dialogue. What follows is a sampling of four of these statements, which exhibit the differences as well as the commonalities of the various groups that gathered that evening.*

## **Christ Church Deer Park (Anglican)**

Dear Friends:

As we celebrate this year's 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Interfaith Dinner, we come together as friends. While we each have our respective spiritual traditions and practices, it is my belief that they are intended to lead us to the Divine that is at the heart of humankind everywhere.

Religion and spirituality are not about possessing truth. No religion can do that. I believe they are rather, an invitation into a journey that can lead us toward the mystery of God. And that is a journey we take as friends searching for truth rather than establishing truth, upholding justice and tolerance above creedal beliefs.

Perhaps how we treat other people is more important than the specifics of what we believe about God, humanity and the rest of the universe. The Golden Rule at the heart of all religious traditions.

Yours faithfully,

The Rev. Canon Dr. Judy Rois  
Rector

## **St. Ansgar Lutheran Church**

Have you ever noticed how badly the media covers religion? Time honoured traditions, rituals, texts and prayers always come off looking silly, empty, and fatuous when viewed on the television screen, or through the lens of a newspaper article or magazine feature written by someone in a big hurry to get to the next big thing. As a pastor, my job allows me to be constantly immersed in the practices, doctrines and traditions of my faith; yet when I see my faith portrayed in the media, I barely recognize it. Maybe

that's because the media is unable to take the time required first to get to know and understand these traditions, and then to communicate them effectively. The investment of time required for faith to play a rich and meaningful role in someone's life cannot not measured in hours, or even weeks or months, but in years.

The same can be said of relationships—especially relationships between people who hold different world views inherited through centuries of divergent traditions and practices. This is the 24<sup>th</sup> annual dinner of this group, which means that some of you here this evening have been investing the years required for inter-faith relationships to be taken seriously. Thank you. Others of us are just beginning. Maybe this is your first or second Neighbourhood Inter-faith Dinner; maybe it's your fifth. Please don't make it your last because, for us, these dinners are just the very first instalments on an investment that will pay off handsomely in peace and understanding for ourselves, our families, our communities and, perhaps one day, even the whole world.

May your experience this evening be the kind of rich and meaningful experience that lasts long after the dishes have been washed and put away, flinging you forward into a beautiful vision of peace and understanding between us all.

Peace,

The Reverend Brian Wilker-Frey  
Pastor □

## **Temple Sinai Congregation**

Sometimes, we make things more complicated than they are. As adults, we search for abstractions and analyses that will allow us to set our priorities. The result is often confusion and distraction. We can gain a more powerful perspective from children. We are lucky when our traditions record the thoughts of youth from previous generations.

The Babylonian Talmud talks about the day that the students took over the house the study. Where did their teaching begin? (Shabbat 104). They taught that most important matter, the first priority, is understanding. The acquisition of information and expertise requires knowledge. To acquire understanding requires experience.

Living in a multicultural city like Toronto, one might guess that we come into contact with our fellow citizens of all backgrounds and faiths

without effort. My sense of the truth is really quite different. While we are surrounded by people of all different cultures, we do not necessarily *meet* one another. Understanding requires that we make the time and effort to get to know the other. This brief time we spend together should lead to the beginning or further building of understanding and relationships.

An evening at an interfaith dinner is of great importance in the world today. When times are tough, we can easily grow more insular and judgmental. However, these are precisely the moments when community is the most important. We need reminders that we are not alone. Whatever our background or profession, whether we live in a family or as an individual, we strengthen ourselves and our community when we reach out. May this evening challenge us to reach beyond the familiar and the comfortable so that we can learn about one another.

Rabbi Michael Dolgin

## **Yorkminster Park Baptist Church**

April 23, 2010

Dear Neighbours and Friends,

I recently watched Bill Maher and Jesse Ventura team up in an interview to launch an assault on religion, or as Ventura preferred, 'organized religion.' They were mocking us and pointing out all of our faults. It is hard to turn on the television or pick up a paper without finding someone taking aim at religion. There may be times when we think we are dodging the bullet because the focus of the attack is not on our particular branch of religion, but in fact when any of us are attacked we all suffer, because in this secular age the outside world no longer has the tools to distinguish one from another.

We are all tarred with the same brush and perhaps this is the one good thing about it. After all, it is not that any of our forms of religion are without fault. None of us have it perfectly figured out, and all of us make mistakes. However, beyond this, at the heart of all our religions is the human spirit questing after the divine in the hope of making this world a better place. The essential similarity is why we go from the Neighbourhood Interfaith Dinner year after year feeling so enriched by the opportunity to have met folk from other faiths. There is something essentially the same in all of us which should cause us to deeply respect and appreciate one another and strengthen our commitment to stand side by side in defending one another's religious

freedoms and championing each other's valuable contributions to society.

Nonetheless when we read attacks on religion, the crowning argument is often how each religion hates the other. It is here that we can and must prove them wrong. For all of us seek that which transcends our human weakness and limitations and through spiritual encounter to discover how to truly love not only God, but also our neighbour as we love ourselves. The enemy in this world is not religion, or those who despise religion. The enemy is hatred, ignorance, and oppression. The cover story of the April 26<sup>th</sup> issue of Maclean's Magazine warns about the revival of Nazi style nationalism and racism. Hatred is never far away, but our love for God and for one another and for the world God loves must triumph. For this reason I simply choose to pray for those who attack us, but for this reason I am also so grateful for the annual Neighbourhood Interfaith Dinner and every opportunity to offer a word of grace and shalom to my dear neighbours and friends of other faiths. May God bless and guide us all.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. J. Peter Holmes  
Minister of the Congregation

## Holy Rosary Church

All religions have something in common: a conviction that there is more to reality than the material universe. An immediate consequence of this conviction is a desire to find some means of making contact with this transcendent realm. That is why each religion will honour some charismatic figure, who assures the rest of us that our desire is not foolish; on the basis of his experience, he is able to convince us that it can be fulfilled. He therefore not only recounts his own experiences but also provides his followers with techniques that will enable them to follow his path.

Another universal in the area of religion is the necessity of some sort of asceticism to achieve this metaphysical state. The dietary laws that characterize most religions, for instance, are based on the principle that the spirit and the body must be in harmony for the latter to escape the confines of the physical world. One author has compared the spiritually adept person to the motor of a Rolls Royce automobile idling effortlessly with a minimum of energy expended but with every part of the mechanism in perfect accord with all the others. It must be noted, however, that these ascetical practices merely prepare the ground for a visitation by the Spirit that, whatever its

guise, offers release into a reality that makes everything else seem pale in comparison.

The movement, consequently, is twofold: the transcendent must come to man, since the infinite distance between the human and divine is unbridgeable from below. But there is also a rising upwards, by which the highest human powers of knowing and loving find an object worthy—and more than worthy—of their unlimited possibilities. Interfaith dialogue is the sharing of aspects common and peculiar to our various traditions.

Daniel Callam, C.S.B.  
Associate Pastor