



PURE LAND LEARNING COLLEGE ASSOCIATION INC. MULTI-FAITH MULTICULTURAL CENTRE



EVERYONE MATTERS. TOOWOOMBA, A MODEL CITY OF PEACE & HARMONY

May-June 2024, Issue 125



TOOWOOMBA COMMUNITY FORUM 2024, CENTERED AROUND 'SOCIAL FLOURISHING'



On May 18th, the Toowoomba Community Forum 2024 brought together over 100 people from various faiths and cultural backgrounds at the St Patrick's Cathedral Centre, centered on the theme of 'social flourishing'.

We were thrilled to host two prominent speakers from New Zealand, Professor Edwina Pio and Mr Anthony Jamal Green, who shared their wisdom and experience on this important topic. Both are renowned for their efforts in building trust and fostering social flourishing in diverse communities.

Our heartfelt thanks go out to all the organizers, speakers and participants who made the 2024 Toowoomba Community Forum a tremendous success.



(1) Opening address <https://fb.watch/u0hHUakCO1/>

(2) Keynote Speech: From Social Cohesion to Social Flourishing

Professor Edwina Pio <https://fb.watch/u0iCmxXms9/>

(3) Plenary I: A Panel Reflection on Social Flourishing – Toowoomba Experience

Venerable Wu Chin <https://fb.watch/u0hNuxkcpA/>

Kam Athwal https://fb.watch/u0-GDI_GiV/

Fatima Aria <https://fb.watch/u0iKruzOFg/>

(3) Plenary II: Rebuilding Trust The New Zealand Experience

Mr. Anthony Green <https://fb.watch/u0iP7WCTAH/>





1. OPENING ADDRESS

In the opening address from Venerable Wu Shin at the Toowoomba Community Forum 2024, Venerable Wu Shin, President of the Pure Land Learning College Association Inc., shared reflections on how technology has reduced face-to-face interactions and impacted health. His talk stressed the importance of moral education, advocating for teaching children values like kindness and respect from a young age to build stronger communities and emphasized addressing conflicts through benevolence and humility, urging adults to guide children in balancing technology use with personal interactions. The address from Venerable Wu Shin concluded by encouraging everyone to embody these values to foster global peace and happiness.



2. KEYNOTE SPEECH BY PROFESSOR EDWINA PIO 'FROM SOCIAL COHESION TO SOCIAL FLOURISHING'

Professor Edwina Pio's keynote address focused on three main themes:

- (1) **Folded Future:** Using origami as a metaphor, she encouraged individuals to adapt their personal and community practices to unlock their potential and fully embrace their true selves, inspired by nature's cycles.
 - (2) **Common Good:** Professor Pio emphasised that the common good encompasses holistic well-being—physical, mental and social. She highlighted the importance of mutual support and cooperation to enhance social cohesion and equity.
 - (3) **Public Spaces:** She discussed the role of public spaces in promoting community interaction. Public spaces should be inclusive and safe, facilitating cultural and social engagement. Examples from Australia illustrated how thoughtful design can foster inclusivity.
- Professor Pio concluded with a call for individuals to reflect on their contributions and embrace ongoing self-improvement to help build a peaceful and flourishing society.



3. PLENARY I: A PANEL REFLECTION ON SOCIAL FLOURISHING - TOOWOOMBA EXPERIENCE



The speech of Ms. Kam Athwal, Director of Sikh Nishkam Society of Australia, focused on the value of active community participation for social flourishing. She emphasized that unique cultural contributions enhance community cohesion and cited recent changes to Queensland's hate crime laws and collective responses to disasters as examples of effective community action. Ms. Athwal encouraged engaging in positive activities like food festivals and support for the homeless, urging Toowoomba to lead by example in fostering a thriving, inclusive community.



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In her talk, Venerable Wu Chin, Secretary of the Pure Land Learning College Association Inc., addressed rising societal instability and insecurity. She attributed these issues to the erosion of moral values and education, emphasizing the need to return to fundamental virtues and understand causality: good actions lead to positive outcomes, while bad actions result in negative consequences. She urged individuals and institutions to focus on moral teachings and self-reflection to strengthen and harmonize communities.

Venerable Wu Chin concluded with the ten virtuous conducts, promoting practices of compassion, honesty, faithfulness and integrity to foster a more peaceful and thriving society.



Ms. Fatima Aria shared insights from her decade-long experience in Australian communities, highlighting the essentials of a flourishing community. She emphasized the importance of deep relationships, a strong sense of place, and local engagement. Through the story of a pencil maker, she conveyed five key lessons: help others, grow through challenges, learn from mistakes, value inner qualities and leave a positive mark. Her talk underscored that building a thriving community requires collective effort and commitment, encouraging continued action and reinforcing the value of community and individual contributions.

4. PLENARY II: REBUILDING TRUST - THE NEW ZEALAND EXPERIENCE MR. ANTHONY GREEN

Mr Anthony Green's talk used the metaphor of a family holiday to explain rebuilding trust after traumatic events like the Christchurch attack on March 15, 2019. He described this journey as one of fluctuating enthusiasm and fatigue, reflecting broader societal changes. Mr Green highlighted the dual nature of trust: its importance both vertically (in institutions like government and police) and horizontally (within communities and personal interactions).

Mr Green shared personal experiences and critiqued media narratives, noting how sensationalism can distort perceptions and deepen distrust, particularly regarding the attack. He discussed trust's role across various contexts, including first responders, government bodies and personal relationships.

He examined how trauma impacts societal trust, emphasizing the need for vigilance and empathy. Mr Green advocated understanding diverse perspectives, acknowledging community strengths and ensuring all voices are heard. He called for transparent communication and recognizing shared humanity to aid in healing and rebuilding trust.

In conclusion, Mr Green voiced support for creating safe spaces for dialogue and challenging conversations to foster mutual respect and understanding. He urged reflection on how stories and perceptions shape trust and calls for inclusive approaches to ensure everyone feels valued and heard in crises.





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CALL ON MAYOR GEOFF MCDONALD



On 13 May, Venerable Wu Dao, Venerable Wu Hsing, and Venerable Zhuang Yen from the Pure Land Learning College Association, Ms Ann Marie Pawsey (Principal of Ming-De International School), Thomas Tan (the Quality Assurance Manager of the Royal Brisbane Institute of Technology), and the Secretariat from MFMCC paid a courtesy call on Mayor Geoff McDonald.

Venerable Wu Dao expressed gratitude to the Mayor and the Council for their unwavering support of Pure Land's initiatives, particularly in collaborating with diverse religious and cultural groups.

Mayor Geoff shared his optimism for the ongoing collaboration between the Council and Pure Land. The Mayor kindly gifted Venerable Wu Dao and the delegates Toowoomba pins, emphasising its significance as a symbol of unity and collaboration.



"OUT OF THE BOX" PROGRAM



From 14-16 May, our centre in collaboration with Together for Humanity, offered a program called 'Out of The Box' at Centenary State High School, the Scouts, and Gatton Mosque. It is a one-hour anti-prejudice workshop in which facilitators from diverse cultures and faiths invite students to examine their assumptions about Australian identity and stereotypes. It was presented in an interactive way, focusing on student-led Q&A. This program is all about boosting our kids' confidence and helping them tackle issues of identity and belonging in a diverse society.

While in Toowoomba, the team also met up with local police to discuss possible collaboration, aiming to extend the benefits of these programs to more of our local community. We're thrilled to announce that the team is now booked in with more schools this July to bring their incredible programs to Year 7-12 students and special sessions for staff!



EXTRACTS OF TOOWOOMBA DELEGATES' REFLECTION OF MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE TRIP



REV'D MELISSA CONWAY, MEMBER OF TOOWOOMBA INTERFAITH WORKING GROUP

Around 5.45 am in my 13th floor hotel room in Melaka, I experienced for the first time a public call to prayer, from one of the nearby mosques. For me, this was a call I could respond to in my own Christian tradition, taking time to pray what we know as the Morning Office. Shortly after I completed my prayers, the bells rang at a nearby Catholic church, the tune from a well-known hymn. The practices of my own tradition were reinforced and enhanced.

These moments of insight were matched by insights gained in many different places, as we visited schools, a Buddhist temple, a meditation and retreat centre, and a workshop space. The cities of Melaka and Singapore themselves provided many insights as well. In Melaka one can clearly see the many layers of culture, including indigenous Malay, Chinese, Dutch, Portuguese and British, converging into a beautiful and colourful harmony. Although we visited Singapore only briefly, I was struck by the beauty and order of place and culture.

For me, key learnings included the importance of dialogue and relationships between cultures and faiths as the building blocks of understanding, friendship and peace. When we speak together from the heart and with an open mind, especially over shared food, it becomes almost impossible to have enmity between us, even when we have disagreements. The many presentations and conversations about faith emphasised for me the values shared by people of faiths. These include values of peace, generosity, hospitality, humility, education and contemplation, although we may express them differently.

The impact of this adventure for my working life, as a minister in a Christian church, is immense. I am inspired to continue learning about faith and culture and to be always curious about the lives of others, particularly those who hold different beliefs and practices. Finally, I am filled with optimism and hope for the future of humanity, enabling and encouraging me to advocate for peace and good will.





SENIOR CONSTABLE CATHERINE ENGLISH, CROSS CULTURAL LIAISON OFFICER, DARLING DOWNS DISTRICT

This experience has provided me with a strong foundation to fulfilling my role as Cross Cultural Liaison Officer for the Darling Downs District.

The people in Melaka and Singapore were very welcoming and helpful, whether they were formally meeting our group or interacting with us in markets and the city. It is encouraging to meet so many people that are truly invested in creating peace and harmony, regardless of what nation or faith we hail from.

The Call to Prayer drew my attention to the absence of audible religious messages in our own Australian communities. It is only when you hear bells and prayers ringing out that you feel the loss. Along with the realisation that increasingly Australians have never experienced this symbol and connection to faith.

It was interesting to note other differences to Australia, in particular, the level of involvement by government in the way not-for-profit organisations and community groups conduct business and how that influences relationship building and collaboration. It has outlined to me the continuing importance in my own work with culturally and linguistically diverse communities to develop their understanding of Australian law to ensure community safety and trust.

I also acknowledge the incredible people across Australia building true connections through shared commonalities across many faith and cultural traditions. I am very honoured to have joined this trip to discuss strategies designed to overcome barriers and bias with the Malaysian and Singaporean communities.



SENIOR CONSTABLE DEB STEWART MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS UNIT QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE

Recently I had the most incredible opportunity to travel to Malaysia and Singapore as part of the Toowoomba Pure Land Learning College Association, Inc. delegation.

It was my first time to Malaysia. The city of Melaka was remarkable. The city's beauty and historical sights were a highlight. To say we were looked after by the Malaysian people is an understatement. On each of our official visits, we were so warmly welcomed, and I really enjoyed engaging in conversations and learning from all those who were so passionate about interfaith dialogue.

Although our time in Singapore was short, I was encouraged by the effort of organisations and community members trying to build interfaith peace and harmony. I am always proud of being a police officer in the Queensland Police Service (QPS), but it was at this meeting in Singapore that highlighted the outstanding commitment the QPS has in building and maintaining relationships with our multi-Faith and multicultural communities. Sadly, this is not the case for other policing agencies. I felt privileged to be a member of the QPS organisation and our role within communities.

Our travelling group was diverse in every way, but it worked. I had conversations which made me laugh, ones which challenged my thoughts and views and discussions with people that were inspiring. To be honest, I was quite surprised at the variety and depth of topics that were discussed, and I found it extraordinary that people who only had just met, were willing to share their stories so openly.



SARMAD BAJWAH, MEMBER OF TOOWOOMBA YOUTH PEACE GROUP

Attending the International Peace and Harmony Forum in Malaysia was an extremely memorable trip, which will forever hold a special place in my heart.

The various sessions and workshops that I attended during this trip were both intriguing and enjoyable. I found the workshop facilitated by Mr Farid Hamid the most impactful. It allowed me to learn from people who have experienced the highest highs and lowest lows in their lives and what coping mechanisms they utilised. It opened my heart and made me empathise with people I had never met before.

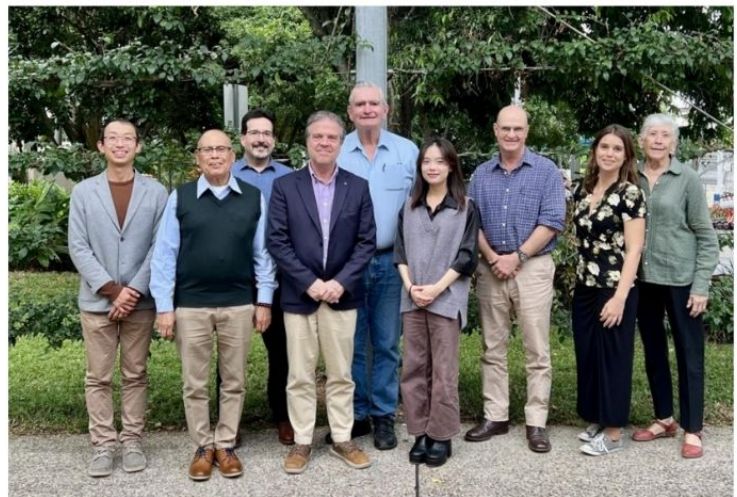


The speakers at the forum all left a lasting impression on me. The wisdom of the words spoken by each speaker reflected the values of peace, tolerance, and oneness—values I hold very dear to my heart. They provided valuable knowledge and insights into the Malaysian experience regarding Interfaith dialogue and youth engagement. Further, networking was another positive outcome of this wonderful trip. Learning more about the lives of the new people I met was interesting and being able to engage with other like-minded people.

Attending this trip has inspired and motivated me to continue working for the Toowoomba Youth Peace Group and other organisations working towards great causes. I would highly advise anyone, especially the youth of today's society, to take up any opportunity that comes your way.

MEETING UP WITH UN REPRESENTATIVE

The Pure Land Learning College Association Inc., represented by Scott McGrath (Chair of the Goodwill Committee, Toowoomba) and John Agnew (Chair of the Toowoomba Interfaith Working Group), had a lunch meeting with Mr Damian Cardona Onses, the Director of the United Nations Information Centre for Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific! During the meeting, we discussed current issues and concerns, exploring ways to collaborate in promoting peace and enhancing social flourishing. The discussion was very fruitful, and Mr Onses expressed his willingness to connect us with agencies that could support our agenda.



Also present at the lunch discussion were Susan Harris-Rimmer, President of UNAA QLD; Wendy Flannery, Vice President of UNAA QLD; Van Den Steen, Intern at UNAA QLD; and Professor Luis Cabrera of Griffith University.

Join us for 102.7FM Voices of Faith! Tune in to your radio or visit <https://1027.com.au> from 6:00 to 6:30 PM Friday and Sunday to enjoy the enlightening talks.

If you would like to share your beliefs, customs and cultures, please contact the Multi-faith Multicultural Centre via email to mfmcc.pllc@gmail.com.

The program is proudly sponsored by the Pure Land Learning College Association Inc., which means that is free of charge to you.

