

Editorial

As a dialogue organisation, Affinity always tries to inaugurate events that showcase our cultural traditions in a multicultural Australia. From Mosque Open Days to *Ramadan* Iftar dinners to cultural study tours of Turkey, we continually strive to make a difference in sharing our Islamic religious traditions with members of the wider Australian community. Notwithstanding the fact we facilitate opportunities for the Muslim community to experience the religious traditions of other faiths, such as Buddhists at *Nien Tan Temple*, Jewish festivals at *Temple Emanuel* and Christmas tradition at various Cathedrals, Churches around Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong.

In December, we held yet another unique event in order to celebrate two Islamic religious traditions known as *Ashura* (Noah's pudding) and *Eid ul Adha* (the sacrifice by Abraham). In keeping with tradition, we shared an Abraham meal known as *Kavurma* (pronounced Ka-wur-ma) followed by the dessert called *Ashura* (Noah's Pudding), where else but on a cruise boat symbolising the Ark. How else can we re-enact Prophet Noah's tradition but on a boat?

Ashura is a day of great historical significance. According to Islamic tradition, on this day, God accepted the repentance of Adam after his exile from Paradise, God saved Noah and his companions in the ark, God spoke directly to Moses and gave him the 10 Commandments and the sea was divided as the nation of Israel was delivered from captivity and Pharaoh's army was destroyed.

Sharing Noah's pudding is a symbolic representation of the unity and essential relationship of humans to one another and to their Creator. Preparing the Noah's pudding is a common practice among Muslims and Christians around the Mediterranean.

Like in previous years, we hosted a group of Muslims to visit various Cathedrals' and Churches around Sydney and Wollongong over Christmas. This has become a common activity over the last few years where Australian Muslim's show their respects to the religion of nearly 70% of Australian's.

I wish everyone a prosperous and safe period during the holiday break and a productive and peaceful 2011.

Mehmet Saral
President

"Prophets, Nations & Communities - Meet, Greet and Celebrate" - The tradition of Abraham and Noah

Over its nearly ten year history, Affinity Intercultural Foundation continually strives to develop and sustain social harmony amongst different faith and cultural communities. With its latest serving of new ideas, on the eve of 13th of December 2010, Affinity hosted members from the different faith and cultural communities on a cruise ship, symbolising Noah's Ark, meandering around the picturesque Sydney Harbour.

With the sun making its way over the horizon and the glittering Sydney skyline on show, the selected guests were invited to an evening of dialogue and understanding, pondering over the theme - "Prophets, Nations & Communities – Meet, Greet & Celebrate".

The evening commenced with a light cocktail at the top deck of the cruiser ship allowing everyone to take in the scenery whilst mingling with each other. Notable guests included members from politics, leading religious personalities from the Catholic & Uniting churches, Buddhists, academics, educators, media and public service.



The event was held in the spirit of displaying the hospitality that Abraham was well known for as it coincided with the recent celebrated **Eid-ul Adha** (The Sacrifice of the Ram) and also the period of **Ashura** (Noah's Pudding), whereby Noah had built his Ark to save his community from the oncoming floods. Guests enjoyed the traditional *kavurma*, which was the simple yet tasty diced meat from *Eid-ul Adha* and had *Ashura* (Noah's Pudding) for dessert, a dish prepared yearly by Muslims in remembrance of Noah.

Vice President **Ahmet Keskin** welcomed everyone to the inaugural cruise dinner and emphasised how the different communities should unite on commonalities to help the less fortunate people within the wider community. He commented on how there's strength in diversity and just like the dessert, Ashura (Noah's Pudding) is made up of distinct ingredients, yet when they come together produce an exquisite taste, the collaborative effort of all communities when united under a common cause produce a resolute force that could help overcome many obstacles we face. In sharing this meal, we also shared our roots and origins, celebrating our similarities.



The evening provided ample time to hear reflections from the floor. Below are some highlights :

Mr Victor Dominello, State MP for Ryde, stated *"Serving the community is an act that unites all of humanity. There is so much need for this type of work in our community. When I look at the topics that are addressed by Affinity, they talk about service, building bridges... The things that unite us, our desire to serve people and help people. These are the things we must focus on as we move to the future."*

Rev Dr Patrick McInerney from the Columban Mission Institute commented *"We are on the same boat, people gathered around these tables are not only Christians but Buddhists, Muslims, Jews and a variety of religions. It's a microcosm of our world and that we can take the ship as a metaphor for the planet. We share one world together and so we must learn to get along with each other."*

Bishop Peter Ingham from the Wollongong Catholic Diocese thanked Affinity for bringing together the different faith traditions and reminded us that *"we share one God and we are united through Abraham, our common ancestor in faith."*

Mr Jeremy Jones from the Australian/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council highlighted how *"Each one of us is but a single light, but together we shine strong"*.

A/Prof Marion Maddox from Macquarie University mentioned *"how it's everyone's responsibility to not only look after humanity and work together in our commonalities but the environment is collectively all of our responsibility and emphasis needs to be put in this area as well"*.

Ms Rachel Seath from the Nan Tien Buddhist Temple reflected on how *"When religion is used correctly, it can enhance Society"*

Mr John Oldmeadow, Executive Director - Board of Education Uniting Church NSW Synod stated that *"People in power have the responsibility to act with Justice"*.

Muslim Village website founder, Mr Ahmed Kilani, finished the reflections by reminding us that *"Noah's story reflects determination in challenging times, highlighting how the whole of humanity came together"* as it complimented the theme of the night quite succinctly.



The program was concluded with remarks from Affinity's President, **Mr Mehmet Saral**, who thanked everyone for their attendance and highlighted the contribution each person who attended that evening, makes to the society to further enhance social harmony. Mr Saral Mehmet also said, *"As God's most valuable creatures on Earth, it is an obligation upon all human beings to love, respect or at least communicate with one another. In particular when we live in a wonderful country like Australia, it is imperative that we achieve a society which lives in harmony, cohesion and mutual understanding. What we seek is quite valuable and all things of value do not come easy. As a society we need to work together. By society, we mean all members and units, including Government Agencies, NGO's, Faith Groups, schools and Cultural Organisations."* He also acknowledged the diverse range of floor reflections provided and awarded them with a small gift to close the evening.

Affinity co-ordinates Muslim Community visits to Cathedrals during Christmas

During Christmas, Affinity executive members and various members of the Muslim community once again set out to visit Catherdals and Churches around Sydney and Wollongong.

For over 6 years, Affinity has taken the initiative of visting places of worship during the most sacred time for our Christian friends, Christmas and Easter.

Affinity views these visits as a great way to establishing dialogue and long lasting relationships with others. Affinity President Mr Mehmet Saral stated that 'it is important to go beyond dialogue and pay respects to each other's faith tradition by visiting each other during special times such as Christmas'.

On Christmas Eve for Midnight Mass, we visited **Our Lady of Rosary Cathedral in Waitara** where **Bishop David Walker** welcomed 15 members of the Muslim community to the Cathedral as well as **St Francis Xavier's Cathedral in Wollongong** where **Bishop Peter Ingham** welcomed 8 members of the Muslim community to the Cathedral.



Affinity Saral with President Mehmet Cardinal Pell

During Christmas Day, we attended Mass at **St Patrick's Cathedral in Parramatta** where **Bishop Anthony Fisher** welcomed 10 members of the Muslim community to the Cathedral and the beautiful **St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney** where **Cardinal George Pell** welcomed 10 members of the Muslim community to the Cathedral. We also attended service at the **Uniting Church on the Mall in Wollongong** where **Rev Gordon Bradberry** welcomed 10 members of the Muslim community to the Parish.

It was a great pleasure to be able to attend such services that mean so much to around 70% of Australia's population. Affinity would like to thank all churches and the respective Cathedral Bishop's and Parish Ministers for opening their doors and hearts to the Muslim community and making us feel welcome.

Upcoming Events

Study Tour of Turkey in January 2011
Kinross Wolarai Uniting Church High School in Orange
From 16th of January til 4th of February

