

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

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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 kawurma, 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, is 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.

