



World Conference on Religions for Peace Australia

Email: [wcrpaust@iinet.net.au](mailto:wcrpaust@iinet.net.au)

<http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/>

## COVID-19 CRISIS – AN INTERFAITH STATEMENT

**To Australia's Religious, Political and Civic Leaders and to the People of Australia,**

On Friday, March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, senior interfaith leaders from almost all Australian States and Territories met electronically. We decided to share this message with the Australian community.

Australia is now engaged in a health war against an invisible enemy. We are entering unprecedented times, not seen since the flu epidemic of 1919 with its 10,493 official deaths. In such times of crisis, our faith traditions insist on spiritual calmness and inner serenity, always mindful that we must take the necessary precautions to protect ourselves and our loved ones in accordance with and beyond government directives. Our faith traditions also insist that we show utmost concern for all vulnerable people in our family network, in our faith communities and in our local networks and neighbourhoods.

We should correctly be fearful, but not be overcome with overwhelming terror and despair. With their centuries-long histories, all major faith traditions have extensive experience of past epidemics. The Australian Government has now closed all indoor places of worship, and we support that decision.

We congratulate religious leaders who have closed down religious services and their places of worship and we congratulate those who have taken the initiative to livestream their worship celebrations. We are not against religious buildings remaining open for private, individual prayer on the strict condition that social distance and cleansing provisions are rigidly and regularly enforced.

Faith can be a sustaining force in this time of need, in this time of isolation. We commend to all Australians, especially those in partial or complete lockdown, to seek solace in (i) participating in livestreamed acts of worship, (ii) meditating and praying in the silence of their houses and apartments, (iii) praying before domestic altars, statues and sacred images, (iv) reading and reflecting on passages from the Holy Scriptures of one's spiritual tradition and (v) doing spiritual reading.

In this way, we can all adjust to aloneness and loneliness. And reflect on life and its meaning.

The Covid-19 crisis reminds us all of the fragility and precariousness of life. At this time, we beg religious leaders to avoid extremist and mistaken interpretations of the causes of the plague. And we beg all Australians not to scapegoat particular groups for what is happening and not develop a bunker mentality. And we beg all Australians not to binge- or bulk-buy as it reflects selfishness and a lack of care for, goodwill towards and solidarity with our fellow Australians, especially the vulnerable.

We pray for those who have already died and for their loved ones, and for all those who are ill from the virus as well as those are fearful in the face of the threat of illness and death

We pray for the doctors, nurses and other health workers caring for the sick and perhaps risking their lives, and for the medical scientists working speedily for solutions.

We pray for the health care and emergency services chaplains and their support volunteers who did so much during the bushfires and are now being called upon again to offer their spiritual counselling and pastoral support.

We fear for those who are living alone, especially if they are widowed, and for international students and all others on temporary visas – may they receive the necessary emotional and pastoral support in these times of trial. We are concerned for those living in regional and remote areas to whom we must reach out.

Australia is in an enormous emergency. As the epidemic progresses, we must not underestimate the resultant financial hardship and the mortgage stress that will ensue. We commend the governments, the banks and all other financial institutions for the steps that have already been taken. But more may be needed, not least in multicultural communities who may not have the necessary financial reserves to cope and survive. We ask apartment owners and real estate owners not to evict people and their families when they are unable to pay.

We ask the faith-based welfare organizations to collaborate in mobilising their resources quickly and efficiently to meet the difficulties to be faced by families and individuals, particularly the homeless.

Lastly, we pray for national connectedness and teamwork in addressing the crisis and call upon all faith communities with their on-the-ground spiritual, pastoral and welfare resources in every Australian local, suburban and rural, community to respond quickly and appropriately. We pray.

**Chair:**

Emeritus Professor Desmond Cahill OAM, RMIT University, Chair, Religions for Peace Australia

**Members:**

Dr Brian Adams, Director, Centre for Interfaith & Cultural Dialogue, Griffith University, Brisbane  
Anne Aisatullin, Country Contact, United Religions Initiative, Australia

Ali Ahmed, Secretary, Religions for Peace, Victoria

Dr Susan Ennis, Secretary, Religions for Peace Australia

Dean Sahu Khan, President, Canberra Interfaith Forum

Josie Lacey AM, Chair, Religions for Peace, NSW, Life-member FECCA, Jewish community representative

Dr. Ian Fry, University Scholar, University of Divinity

Ron Mitchell, Convenor Logan Interagency Network, Queensland and Secretary of the Qld Division of the United Nations Association of Australia.

Rev. Chris Parnell, webmaster, [www.religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au](http://www.religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au), Regional Interfaith Network

Philippa Rowlands, Chair, Multifaith Association of South Australia

Terry Susmilch, Convenor, Religions for Peace, Tasmania

Rev Ian Smith, Executive Officer, Victorian Council of Churches

Rev Canon Richard Tutin, General Secretary of Queensland Churches Together and a member of the Executive of Queensland Faith Communities Council.

Rev Andrew Williams, Minister of the Word, Darwin Memorial Uniting Church

Professor Samina Yasmeen, Director, Centre for Muslim States and Societies, University of Western Australia, Perth

**Media contact:** Professor Des Cahill, 0439 995761- available for a video call (emergency Dr Sue Ennis 0400 069 014)

## **A PRAYER DURING TIMES OF COVID-19**

*This prayer has been adapted from a prayer prepared by the United Church of Canada and may have to be adapted for particular faith communities.*

**In this time of Covid-19, we pray:**

**When we are uncertain, O God of many names, help us be calm;**

**When information comes from all sides, correct or not, help us to discern;**

**When fear makes it hard to breathe, and anxiety is the order of the day, slow us down, O Lord;**

**Help us reach out with our hearts, when we cannot touch with our hands and hugs;**

**Help us to be socially connected, when we have to be socially distant;**

**Help us to love as perfectly as we can, knowing that ‘perfect love casts out all fear’.**

**For the doctors, we pray; for the nurses, we pray**

**For the technicians and janitors and the aides and caregivers, we pray**

**For the researchers and theorists,**

**The epidemiologists and investigators,**

**For those who are sick,**

**And those who are grieving, we pray**

**For all who are affected,**

**All around the world.....we pray**

**For safety,**

**For health,**

**For wholeness.**

**May we feed the hungry, may we give drink to the thirsty,**

**May we clothe the naked and house those without homes;**

**May we walk with those who feel they are alone,**

**And may we do all that we can do to heal**

**The sick....in spite of the epidemic, in spite of the fear**

**Help us, O Divine Being, that we might help each other**

**In the love of the divine Creator,**

**In the name of the spiritual Healer,**

**That is in all and with all,**

**We pray.**

**AMEN, MAY IT BE SO.**



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