

## **Building on interfaith legacies: Faith leaders come together for Iftar Dinner**

**Anita Sulentic, *Catholic Outlook*, 10 April 2023**



*Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv, Bishop of Parramatta (left) with Grand Mufti of Australia, Dr Ibrahim Abu Muhamad at the 2023 Iftar dinner co-hosted by the Diocese of Parramatta and the Columban Centre for Muslim-Christian Relations. Image: Diocese of Parramatta.*

Over 100 leaders from every faith community gathered with politicians, members from educational institutions, charity groups and grass-roots organisations for the annual Interfaith Iftar dinner co-hosted by the Diocese of Parramatta and the Columban Centre for Muslim-Christian Relations on Tuesday 27 March 2023.

Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv, Bishop of Parramatta, along with Grand Mufti of Australia, Dr Ibrahim Abu Muhamad gave keynote speeches with both reflecting on the similarities between people of faith.

As Bishop Vincent said in his welcome: “we are honoured by your presence, enriched by your friendship and made better citizens by working alongside with you. We are better and stronger together, Buddhists, Sikhs, Baha’is, Jews, Muslims, Christians and other faith traditions. Working together, we can be a force for the common good and the upbuilding of our society and our world.”

Held during Ramadan and Lent – both significant times of reflection, prayer, almsgiving and prayer for Muslims and Christians – the annual Interfaith Iftar dinner is one way the newly formed Diocese of Parramatta Interfaith Commission is promoting a culture of encounter, dialogue, understanding and solidarity, both within and outside the Church.

“Western Sydney is the epicentre of an ethnically diverse, multicultural and multifaith Australia. My predecessor Bishop Emeritus Kevin Manning worked tirelessly to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding and trust in the wake of September 11. He built bridges and friendships at the time when relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim Australians was fraught with challenges.

“At my installation nearly seven years ago, I pledged to build on his legacy. I believe we must foster pathways across the political and religious divide to facilitate a more inclusive and harmonious society,” said Bishop Vincent.

Political representatives included Donna Davis, newly elected Member for Parramatta, Lynda Voltz, Member for Auburn, Hugh McDermott, Member for Prospect and Julia Finn, Member for Granville.

Throughout the evening, guests were invited to participate in prayer, song, conversation as well as hear from speakers including Fr Patrick McInerney, Director of the Columban Centre for Muslim-Christian Relations who made remarked on the fabricated animosity between Christians and Muslims.

“The core of this fabricated animosity is that they do not know one another. They are *strangers* to each other. They only hear sensationalised accounts about one another from the media. And hence they misrepresent each other in their minds, far removed from reality, and this plays out in negative attitudes and discriminatory actions.

“The key to healing these broken relations is getting to know one another,” he said.

Fr Patrick then quoted the 2023 Ramadan Message from the Vatican’s Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue: “we are aware, dear friends, that peaceful and friendly coexistence faces many challenges and threats: extremism, radicalism, polemics, disputes, and religiously motivated violence. The threats are fuelled by a culture of hate. We need, then, to find the most appropriate ways of countering and overcoming such a culture, enhancing instead, enhancing love and friendship, in particular between Muslims and Christians, due to the bonds that unite us.”

Bishop Vincent concluded “this sacred time reminds us of our common obligations to uphold the dignity of every human being, to make peace, to nurture goodwill and to facilitate unity in the face of economic and social inequality, cultural polarisation and fragmentation. We can be the places that model a community of love, justice and solidarity.”

The evening finished with hymns sung by a group of musicians from Catherine McAuley High School in Parramatta.

