

Celebrating Fifty Years of Interfaith Dialogue

By Teresa Pirola

Fifty years ago, the Church took a major step in positively rephrasing its understanding of its relationship to other religious communities.

The drafting of the document *Nostra Aetate* began as a statement of a renewed relationship with the Jewish people, and soon broadened its scope to include Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, encouraging dialogue with followers of other religions.

Nostra Aetate (its Latin title means 'In our time') was promulgated 28 October 1965. Over the past fifty years the Church and the world have undergone immense change. Australia today is a multicultural and relatively tolerant and peaceful society. The Church views diversity as a blessing and promotes dialogue as an essential trait of the Catholic life. However there remains much work to be done, especially in these globally complex and tense times, to encourage Catholics to embrace the Church's commitment to interfaith dialogue and to act as leaven for peace and understanding in Australian society.



Emma Baynie, parishioner of Hornsby Parish, attended an International gathering in Rome commemorating *Nostra Aetate's* fiftieth anniversary.

In many dioceses around the world the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of this remarkable document are in the form of conferences. Taking a different approach, the Diocese of Broken Bay has introduced an action-oriented grassroots strategy called "Get to Know the Neighbours."

As a way of furthering the vision of *Nostra Aetate* 'on the ground', parishes are encouraged, over the next 12 months, to make at least one meaningful contact with another religious tradition which resides within or near their neighbourhood. An accompanying leaflet offers practical suggestions and offers the Broken Bay Interfaith Commission as a resource in finding or making local contacts. [See www.dbb.org.au/ecumenism-interfaith]

Already this year, our Diocese can celebrate examples of these interfaith neighbourhood connections. During Ramadan, for instance, 75 Catholics and Muslims from the Hills District came together for an Iftar Dinner hosted at St Agatha's Pennant Hills. Joining in this 'neighbourhood Iftar' was the Grand Mufti of Australia Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohammed who will again visit St Agatha's on 1 November. In our Diocese invitations are also being issued to experience Saturday BBQs and Sunday breakfasts with Muslim families (courtesy of Affinity Intercultural Foundation).

A number of neighbourly connections have been made this year with Jewish communities where groups of teachers and parishioners have visited synagogues at Chatswood and St Ives, where Catholic representatives recently



Torah scrolls viewed at synagogue by Catholic visitors.

participated in a Jewish Shabbat Dinner, where others joined in High Holy Day services, and where Catholics gather every month to learn Torah with a local Jewish Rabbi.

Opportunities for neighbourly connections also exist with the Baha'i community, given that our Diocese shares a neighbourhood with one of seven Baha'i Temples throughout the world. There is also a number of Buddhist prayer places tucked away in our neighbourhoods as well as opportunities for Hindu and Sikh connections.

Meanwhile, a number of key young adults from Broken Bay forge interfaith leadership networks, and we are blessed with school teachers and catechists responsive to the interfaith links arising naturally through their work.

For more about the strategy "Get to Know the Neighbours", visit: www.dbb.org.au/ecumenism-interfaith or contact Teresa Pirola teresa.pirola@dbb.org.au 0417 438 736