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## **Annual General Meeting – 15 May 2019**

### **Chairperson's Report**

At the end of my first year as Chairperson of Cape Town Interfaith Initiative, I look back slightly breathlessly but with great pride at what our team has achieved in that time. It has been a year of getting to know you on so many levels and I feel deeply privileged for the opportunity to serve in this capacity.

Over the past year we have seen immense growth, a resurgence of energy, international recognition and the emergence of a new kind of interfaith community. It is customary to end with thanks, but I feel the need to start there.

As the incoming Chairperson from June 2018, I was blessed with an incredibly loyal and dedicated Board. To each of them, my heartfelt thanks – what an honour to work with you. I am especially proud of the fact that we are a solidly intergenerational team and I believe the contribution of this factor to our success cannot be overestimated. Our young leaders have the insight, the vision and the languaging that will guide us into a sustainable and exciting future.

To the Advisory Council: words cannot express our gratitude for your support and willingness to step up and get your hands dirty. Every single one of you has played a role, but I want to pay particular respect to our founding elders Rev Gordon Oliver, Mary Frost, James Ellman and Gwynne Robbins whose cheering at the sidelines never faltered.

When Sarah, Kirtanya, Mark, Ayanda and I stepped into our new roles on the Board, we could not have imagined what was waiting for us. We knew that we had taken on an organisation which had reached the limits of what it could achieve as a purely volunteer organisation, and we knew that our mandate was to take things to the next level. We needed to create long term sustainability.

The year exploded on us. It was hard at times to maintain focus, and there were definite challenges to navigate. In our inexperience with the organisation, we often did not know the right questions to ask. Sometimes, in discovering who we want to become, we learn who it is we do not want to become. But all in all, it was a tremendous learning curve and I believe that as an organisation we can be justifiably proud of our achievements.

Of course the biggest achievement was the biggest surprise of all, the winning of the HM King Abdullah II prize for World Interfaith Harmony Week. Apart from the extraordinary and blessed experience that James and I enjoyed during our trip to Jordan, we also learned about partnerships, fair play and the kind of integrity that builds lasting relationships. The event which won the prestigious international accolade was Love of Neighbour - Prayers for our City which took on a new flavour this year as we co-

hosted the event in Elsie's River with Faith Hope Love Communities, at their invitation. Taking the prayers to the people rather than having the event in the City Centre, seems to have touched the hearts of many and is certainly a new tradition that we intend to expand on in years to come.

The WIHW prize takes us also to a new level in terms of our responsibility to the cause of Interfaith harmony. We realise that although what we do here in Cape Town is for the Cape Town community, we have an impact on a larger, global stage. Our task is to encourage other organisations, most particularly in Southern Africa, to continue their efforts to build interfaith harmony. The names Pittsburgh, Christchurch, Sri Lanka and San Diego have come to symbolise why our work is so very important in the world today. There truly can be no place for hate and it is up to us to reach out in friendship and help to make our world a safer place for everyone.

Relationship building has been an enormous part of our first year, as the Board chose the theme "Building Community" as a focus area when we got together in December for a wrap up and assessment of our first six months.

Here is a short synopsis of our various projects and how we implemented that theme.

### **Sacred Connections**

Building Community was the primary motivation for starting our monthly Sacred Connections gatherings in October 2018. The idea was that each month we would gather three different traditions and share the joyful expressions of our spiritual practices. It is a way of getting to know each other and experiencing the depth of what Interfaith is about. Building relationships within our interfaith community must be an equal focus with building our organisational and international relationships. Without each other, we do not exist as an organisation. Our first Sacred Connections was hosted by the Brahma Kumaris and included Hindu, Interfaith and African Traditional elements. In November we gathered at Princess Vlei, sang some Taize chants and held a water ceremony to join our sacred waters with those of Canada, using holy water gifted to Sarah during her trip to the Parliament of the World's Religions. The Emissaries of Divine Light hosted us in December and in January we gathered under the trees at Salesians Life Choices. February found us at the Hare Krishna Temple, March was hosted by Cape Town Unitarians and our April gathering was part of the Radiant Current of Interfaith Indaba hosted by Novalis Ubuntu Institute. Please join us next Sunday, 26 May at the Rondebosch United Church for something a little different.

### **Schools Programme**

The Marlene Silbert Youth Interfaith Intercultural Programme has continued to thrive. Despite a personally challenging year, Marlene has steadfastly continued her fundraising activities as well as her work with the Department of Education, getting the children's version of the Charter for Compassion accepted into schools. Rev Natalie Simons-Arendse and Sarah Oliver have done an exceptional job as always, co-ordinating the nine schools and 40 learners on the programme this year. Natalie and Sarah presented on their work at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Toronto during November, and our relationship with that organisation is one that we would like to nurture. It has been wonderful to see some of the MSYIIP learners joining in other CTII activities such as the Freedom Day bus tour.

### **Sacred Space**

The Sacred Space committee has continued to meet regularly and our outgoing Treasurer Mark Bind is currently working on a business plan for the project. Once this plan is finalised, a formal presentation will be made to City of Cape Town.

## **Open Hearts Open Minds**

A number of Open Hearts Open Minds dialogues or panel discussions have taken place in collaboration with partner Faith Organisations such as the Ahmadiyya Community, the Turquoise Harmony Institute and Jewish Board of Deputies. Dr Mamphela Rampole has agreed to participate in an upcoming OHOM discussion.

## **Charter for Compassion**

Earlier this year we were granted an appointment with Mayor Dan Plato, who expressed that he is keen to continue to implement the Charter for Compassion which he signed during his previous tenure as Mayor, in 2014. We told Mayor Plato that we were disappointed with the closure of the City of Cape Town religious desk in June last year, and he promised to look into that and see if it could be reinstated.

At the Observance of Compassion for Christchurch, which was held at Groote Kerk on 24 March, and during the Observance of Compassion for Sri Lanka, which was held at the Al Azhar Mosque on 28 April, the Charter for Compassion was read by representatives of various communities.

Sarah and I met a group from Olean, USA, who were in Cape Town on an unrelated tour, but who reached out to us as they have an active Charter for Compassion organisation. As a result, I will be spending time with them during my graduation trip next month and will be presenting briefly at a Charter for Compassion conference at which the Charter's global co-ordinator Marilyn Turkovich is the keynote speaker. I also plan to travel to Atlanta to connect with Compassionate Atlanta and hope to bring back innovative and inspirational ideas to expand our own relationship with the Charter globally for the enhancement of the Cape Town Interfaith community. Nurturing opportunities for partnership and collaboration is one way of ensuring our continued sustainability through possible funding options but also through the flow of energy, ideas, mutual encouragement and the sheer joy of connection.

## **Heritage Day Bus Tour**

Our Heritage Day Bus Tour 2018 was once again an enriching experience, thanks as always to Mary Frost and her team. The tour included the Slave Church in Long Street, the Unitarian Church, Tana Baru in the Bo-Kaap and the Muir Street Mosque where Sheikh Moerat and his community treated us to a delicious vegetarian meal. We ended the tour with a visit to the impressive Greek Orthodox Church in Woodstock. Mary is already hard at work with her team planning this year's Heritage Day experience - it is an annual highlight that we look forward to. A special shout out to Mohammad Groenewald who is always so generous with his time and expertise every time we visit Tana Baru. And somehow he brings us something new every time.

## **John Oliver Memorial Lecture**

The 2018 John Oliver Memorial Lecture at Erin Hall took the form of a panel discussion led by renowned author Cynthia Bourgeault, and included Wilhelm Verwoerd and Zanele Khumalo. It was an extraordinary evening, a fully sold out box office success at which we learned a lot about overcoming the challenges of the past without losing our hope for the future.

## **Reconciliation Day Peace Walk in District Six**

With Mary Frost and Gwynne Robbins both on the District Six Committee, CTII had a strong presence in the event and we are very grateful to be associated with this important annual gathering. The 2018

turnout was impressive and we look forward to being part of growing the walk into a pilgrimage with a special place on the Cape Town summer calendar.

### **Cape Town TV**

CTII has joined Cape Town TV as a member under a special arrangement whereby membership was free until their AGM on June 8. This gives us access to a broad audience and potentially our own tv show, as well as training which will include the technical aspects of TV production and how to monetise our shows. We envisage an opportunity to engage further with our schools programme participants on this project – another intergenerational opportunity which we are very excited about.

### **Interfaith Seminary**

Our vision from the beginning in terms of sustainability has been the establishment of an interfaith seminary in Cape Town, where people of different faiths can feel comfortable to come together to learn in a formal and experiential way about each other's sacred traditions. We have engaged with a local established institute of higher learning which offers undergraduate, postgraduate and short courses. This university is an NPO with the mission of advancing human dignity and social justice for all through quality education, and we believe there is much synergy between our organisations. We look forward to developing this relationship and exploring the opportunities for collaboration, specifically with their Theology Department .

### **General**

Our unexpected blessing of the WIHW prize as well as careful, frugal management over the past year puts us on a much more positive footing now than this time last year. As CTII moves towards its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary we feel there is much to celebrate, but with the caution that our work is ongoing and we cannot falter now. Our task moving into the next period will be the creation of a long-needed formal fundraising structure through grants and a wide ranging national and international support network. We need to be able to sustain permanent employees and formalise our internal structure in order to support and expand our work.

The Board was sad to lose Ayanda Nabe who stepped down in January for personal reasons, and we are of course also very sad to say goodbye to Mark Bind who has provided a thoughtful, anchoring presence as Treasurer on our Board over the past year. Mark leaves us to devote more time and energy to growing his personal healing and teaching practice. We will miss him very much, but send with him our very best wishes. We will be keeping the porch light on.

I want to thank you all for your enthusiastic and continued support. The many lessons of this year will be with us as we move forward together in collaboration and in sacred community. Unity and Interfaith Harmony means no one can be left behind, or excluded. May peace prevail.

Berry Behr

May 2019