



NATIONAL PEACE CONFERENCE 2023 'ALL GENERATIONS SUPPORTING PEACE AND HARMONY'

On November 18th, the National Peace Conference 2023, organized by the Toowoomba Interfaith Working Group (TIWG), centered around the theme of 'All Generations Supporting Peace and Harmony'. With an impressive turnout of over 100 participants, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the organizers, speakers and attendees for contributing to the resounding success of this event.

While we have received abundant positive feedback, one participant's comment succinctly captures the essence of the conference:

'In my opinion, the chosen topic was excellent. The audience size felt just right—neither too big nor too small. The catering was delightful, and the food was simply amazing. Both the speakers and panelists delivered outstanding presentations, employing simple English that facilitated easy comprehension for the audience. Furthermore, the inclusion of a police representative as a presenter was a brilliant idea, fostering a sense of trust within the community and reinforcing the comforting notion that we are all in this together.'

The highlight of the event was undoubtedly the Diversity By Default Workshop—a game play session that served as an eye-opener, enabling everyone to share and discuss personal experiences with strangers, fostering lasting connections. It proved to be a unique and enjoyable experience for all'.





OPENING ADDRESS FROM VENERABLE WU SHIN

PRESIDENT OF THE PURE LAND LEARNING COLLEGE ASSOCIATION INC.

Venerable Wu Shin emphasized the need for collaborative efforts to nurture responsible younger generations, envisioning a harmonious world through cooperation among diverse backgrounds. The foundation of religious solidarity, based on giving, kind words, beneficial acts and cooperation, was highlighted, with a call for regular gatherings and mutual learning. Venerable Wu Shin expressed gratitude for community efforts in Toowoomba, urging the widespread dissemination of teachings on peace and harmony, resonating with a vision of a unified, peaceful future for all generations.



KEYNOTE ADDRESS FROM TANJA HAGEDORN

TOGETHER FOR HUMANITY

Our keynote speaker, Tanja Hagedorn, delivered an exceptional presentation at the conference, which was featured in our local media, The Chronicle. Ms. Hagedorn shared valuable insights from her work with Together for Humanity, a nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing diversity and bias in schools. She underscored the limitations of events like Harmony Day in fostering deep understanding and expressed reservations about relying solely on strict rules for managing student behavior.

As she concluded her presentation, Ms. Hagedorn urged the audience to be less afraid of conflict, embracing it as an opportunity to engage with people and create better understanding. Through her work, she aims to contribute to positive change and challenge others to view conflict as an avenue for fostering understanding.



PRESENTATION FROM SHIRLEY-ANNE GARDINER

CEO OF MOMENTUM MENTAL HEALTH

Shirley-Anne Gardiner delivered a compelling presentation at the National Peace Conference 2023. The core focus was on the five ways to well-being: Connect, Be Active, Keep Learning, Take Notice and Give. Ms. Gardiner highlighted the comprehensive New Zealand model of health, which encompasses physical, spiritual, emotional and familial well-being.

Throughout the presentation, Ms. Gardiner shared practical tips and examples, such as utilizing street art walking maps for physical activity, finding solace in art for mental well-being and recognizing the positive impact of connecting with animals. She emphasized the importance of setting small goals, maintaining a positive mindset and committing to continuous learning. The presentation concluded with a heartfelt reminder to be humble, kind and authentic.



PRESENTATION FROM CATHERINE ENGLISH QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE

In her impactful presentation at the conference, Senior Constable Catherine English, a cross-cultural liaison officer with sixteen years of police experience, delved into the crucial topic of youth crime and community safety. Acknowledging Toowoomba's rich multicultural history, she underscored the significance of unity and partnerships within the community. With a focus on youth crime prevention, she appreciates community efforts and highlighted upcoming programs. Encouraging engagement with the Queensland Police Service, she emphasized leaders' pivotal role in modeling behavior for peace and respect.



PRESENTATION FROM SISTER VERONICA THE ABBEY ST. MICHAEL'S

Sister Veronica of the Abbey Community shared their inspiring journey at the conference. Founded almost a century ago, the Abbey Community in Caboolture, Queensland, focuses on global peace and acceptance. Sister Veronica highlighted their commitment through initiatives like St. Michael's College and the Abbey Church, fostering unity in diversity. Grateful for support from individuals like Peter Hoppie and collaboration with the Pure Land Learning College Association Inc, they established a multi-faith and Cultural Dialogue Centre in 2018. St. Michael's College educates with a focus on understanding and respect. Sister Veronica concluded by encouraging everyone to be light bearers, symbolizing the Abbey's dedication to spreading peace and harmony.



Q & A SESSION

The Q&A section featured discussions on conflict resolution, mindset and self-understanding. Sister Veronica shared experiences from a student friendship resolution program, emphasizing the value of creating safe spaces for open communication. Ms. Gardiner from Momentum Mental Health highlighted the role of mindset in well-being, promoting self-love and overcoming biases. Ms. Hagedorn discussed conflict resolution, stressing respectful engagement and the importance of understanding personal biases. Senior Constable English from Queensland Police emphasized the critical role of mindset in leadership and conflict resolution, advocating for empathetic listening. The panel also touched on personal growth, overcoming challenges, and community support in rebuilding lives after losses, offering a comprehensive perspective on fostering positive connections for well-being.





‘HEALING THE WORLD’ PANEL DISCUSSION

The ‘Healing the World’ conference session showcased diverse perspectives and personal experiences, forming a rich tapestry of insights on positive global impact. Lena Nabizada, Dylan, Venerable Wu Chin, Dr. Uma, and John Walker collectively emphasized conversation, youth empowerment, transformative education, self-healing and unity. Their experiences underscored individual responsibility and a collective commitment to positive values, painting a cohesive picture of healing as a collaborative journey driven by compassion, understanding and purposeful action for a better world.

Lena Nabizada, founder of Strive Connecting, discussed her journey from Afghanistan to Australia, advocating for unity through conversation and addressing racism. She emphasized youth empowerment, urging leaders to provide platforms for young voices and highlights the significance of nurturing youth leadership. Ms. Nabizada’s call to action inspires reflection, dialogue, and active contributions to ‘heal the world’.

Dylan articulated the generational perspective of Millennials (Gen. Y) on healing the world, identifying climate change, acceptance and inclusion as paramount concerns. He emphasized Gen. Y’s passionate commitment to environmental sustainability, manifested through lifestyle choices and engagement with grassroots initiatives.

Venerable Wu Chin emphasized the transformative power of education, focusing on instilling positive values like filial piety, love and gratitude from early childhood. She advocated for community initiatives rooted in traditional teachings, inspired by the example of Greg Brandon, proposing that 0.01% of the population actively embracing peace and love can contribute to global healing. The key lies in fostering a collective consciousness through education, intergenerational support and a shared commitment to positive values.

Dr. Uma, a local GP and member of the Heartfulness Institute, underscored the importance of finding common ground to heal the world. Reflecting on her upbringing in a less diverse environment, she emphasized the need to look beyond stereotypes and connect on a human level. Drawing from her spiritual practice and professional experiences, Dr. Uma advocated for self-healing as a prerequisite for positively influencing others. She stressed the power of small acts of kindness and encouraging individuals to take personal responsibility for making a difference in their communities. Dr. Uma believes that collective efforts, starting with individual growth and compassion, can create a ripple effect, contributing to the healing of the world.

Mr. John Walker, drawing on the idea of the leaven in a lump of bread, highlighted the potential of a small, unified group to bring about positive change in the world. He acknowledged the current global challenges and emphasized the importance of diagnosing the fundamental disease afflicting humanity, which he identifies as a lack of unity. While envisioning a future world where all religions are seen as reflections of one divine impulse, he suggested a practical approach for the present—working towards the abolition of war as a critical step.



DIVERSITY BY DEFAULT BEING BRIDGES FROM SINGAPORE

In November, Singapore's Being Bridges Team, invited by the Pure Land Learning College Association Inc., introduced the Diversity by Default Workshop in Toowoomba. The workshop employs innovative methods, including a card game covering aspects like race, religion, nationality and culture, to facilitate conversations and break down silos. The team introduced the concept of 'Being Bridges', emphasizing individuals serving as bridges themselves before connecting diverse communities.



They were featured on Toowoomba's Community Radio Station, 102.7 FM, with host Tony Wigan, discussing their initiatives. They also met with Mayor Geoff McDonald, who praised their innovative card game for enhancing diversity understanding. The Peace Conference showcased the workshop's impact, enabling participants to share personal experiences and build connections. The unique and enjoyable experience received positive feedback. Expanding their reach, the workshop engaged Bunya Park and Withcott Scouts on November 17, fostering dialogue and understanding.



VIDEO LINKS FOR NATIONAL PEACE CONFERENCE 2023

(1) Venerable Wu Shin's address

Facebook: https://fb.watch/ozZUhyntFS/ Youtube: https://youtu.be/zyS37KJ7qTqW

(5) Shirley-Anne Gardiner

Facebook: https://fb.watch/ozYumXOntt/ Youtube: https://youtu.be/CPqd0Hhdcng

(2) Presentation of Tanja Hagedorn

Facebook: https://fb.watch/ozYnASLsrI/ Youtube: https://youtu.be/aoc6csloo6w

(6) Q & A

Facebook: https://fb.watch/ozYGbmLIEi/ Youtube: https://youtu.be/Diu35pFJq1w

(3) Presentation of Catherine English

Youtube: https://youtu.be/uJU1atfVjZ0 Facebook: https://fb.watch/oAOKqBqbk/

(7) Diversity by Default Workshop

Facebook: https://fb.watch/ozYluZRPat/ Youtube: https://youtu.be/CGgS4U--RLQ

(4) Presentation of Sister Veronica

Youtube: https://youtu.be/0mZT47xF-4A Facebook: https://fb.watch/oAQaLEqis9/

(8) Healing the World Panel Discussion

Youtube: https://youtu.be/rGSKLeFW14c

Table with 2 columns: Time and Program. It lists the schedule for the National Peace Conference 2023, including registration, keynote addresses, sessions on youth justice, morning tea, Q&A, group photo, lunch, and panel discussions.



The Toowoomba Youth Peace Group's 2023 Symposium 'Collective Dreaming' was an uplifting and successful day held on the 18th of November. Over thirty young people from Toowoomba aged 12-25 were able to come together in the symposium to express and share their individual dreams and barriers through art and discussion. As the day progressed, we were also able to define and create our collective dream as youth to inspire future projects held by our organisation.

The first session facilitated by Basil and Beverly Kannagara was an amazing way to start the day. With the help of the Diversity By Default card game 'Smôl Tôk', all of the participants were able to move around the room and meet new people. Everyone learnt about the individual ideas and thoughts on diversity in the community and its everchanging status.

In the following sessions, we were prompted to think about our individual hopes and dreams for the future in terms of character, career, travel, etc. and then determine the perceived barriers that were hindering us from achieving those goals. Each individual was able to express this on a postcard through art, poetry or simply words. We then widened the focus and worked as a group to decide our collective dream and depicted it in a large collaborative space. This activity not only shifted our awareness from internal to external from the previous session but allowed us to create a united intention for the future.

Sruthi Gandu
President, TYP.G



YOUTH SYMPOSIUM 2023 'COLLECTIVE DREAMING'

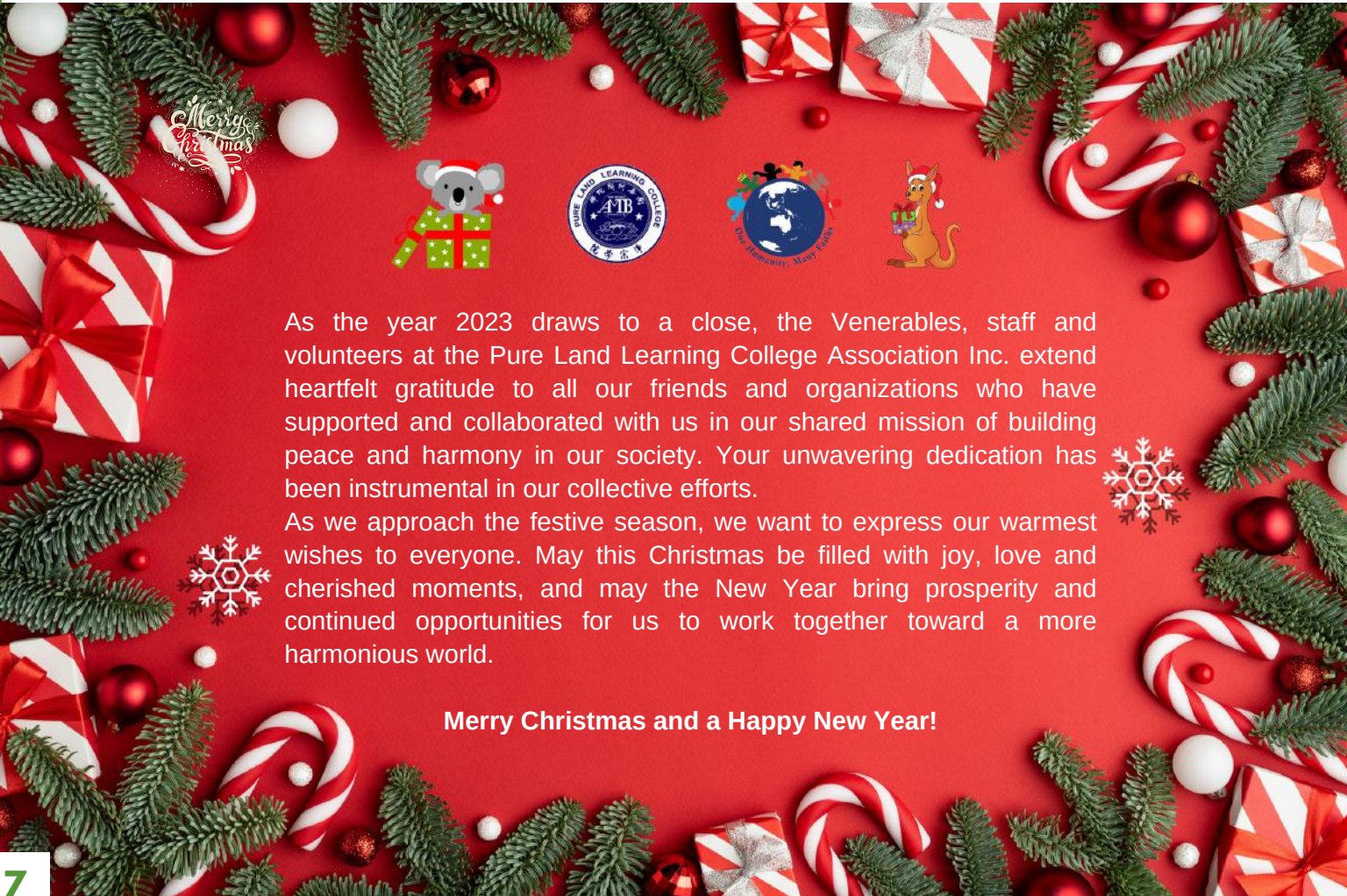


youth



TIWG & PLLCA APPRECIATION GATHERING 2023

On 6th December, the Toowoomba Interfaith Working Group (TIWG) wrapped up its meetings for 2023 with a concluding appreciation gathering held by the Pure Land Learning College Association Inc.



As the year 2023 draws to a close, the Venerables, staff and volunteers at the Pure Land Learning College Association Inc. extend heartfelt gratitude to all our friends and organizations who have supported and collaborated with us in our shared mission of building peace and harmony in our society. Your unwavering dedication has been instrumental in our collective efforts.

As we approach the festive season, we want to express our warmest wishes to everyone. May this Christmas be filled with joy, love and cherished moments, and may the New Year bring prosperity and continued opportunities for us to work together toward a more harmonious world.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!