

## PRESENTATIONS

### YOUTH FORUM (Sat)

- **Opening Buddhist Prayer**

*Setting Bodhicitta motivation:* Generate the attitude that in order that I may be of the most benefit to all living beings I will cultivate an enlightened mind.

*4 immeasurables:*

Love – May all beings have happiness and it's causes.

Compassion – May all beings be free from suffering and it's causes

Joy – May all beings never be parted from sorrowless joy

Equanimity – May all beings abide in equanimity free from attachment or aversion.

- **10min forum style followed by Q&A. Topic: “Youth 4 Interfaith in 2020: What could be the opportunities and challenges for youth participation?”**

Opportunities:

Change the dynamic between faith communities to one of co-operation.

Bringing religion and values back into the conversation.

Harnessing existing resources.

Increasing our effect by working together.

Challenges:

Resistance from existing institutions

Apathy from young people who feel religion is irrelevant.

Antipathy/ from exclusivists and militant atheists.

- Facilitate 2 Workshops.
- 40min presentation followed by 20min Q&A

# A Generation of Bridge-Builders

(Are we recording?)

Thank You Lachlan and others. I am so excited by this event. Saddened by what's happened in Christchurch.

I want to start by sharing a secret with you. I'm a religious fundamentalist. [PAUSE]

## \*Sheikh, rattle & roll

A few years ago I attended a gathering of interfaith youth in the US. It was great. For the first time I wasn't the only guy in a skirt! For the final evening program a respected Muslim scholar, Sheikh Hamza Yusef was set to talk. I'd never heard a Muslim teaching before and wasn't quite sure what to expect. But what followed was one of the most profound and eye-opening experiences of my life. The Sheikh spoke about love, compassion, kindness, forgiveness and service. He used the language of Islam to communicate a message that resonated with me as a Buddhist. The words were new to me, but their meaning was familiar. The message he delivered was universally relevant. And I was simply stunned. I heard his call to action because like me, Sheikh Hamza is a religious fundamentalist. The fundamentals of his religious tradition (indeed I would say all the major religions) are principles such as peace and compassion.

I remember turning to my friend Anna that night and saying “ He sounds like a Buddhist teacher!”

## \*The F-word

It's a interesting how people who truly embody their spirituality seem so **alike**, be they Buddhist, Muslim, Christian or Jew. Look at Martin Lutern King, Rumi, Mandela, Ghandhi, The Dalai Lama and you will notice they share something in common. In the same way religious extremists, be they suicide-bombers in the middle-east or koran-burners in the American mid-west, have more in common with one another than the majority of religious people. Sadly there is a movement of hateful extremism which **hijacks religion** to alienate and divide. They commonly call this fundamentalism. As you might have guessed I'm a big fan of **the F-WORD**. But not as we currently use it. The problem I find is that it frames those who are “truly” religious as closed-minded, extreme, distorted, radical, and often hateful. And those who witness this can only conclude that religion itself is to blame, when this couldn't be further from the truth. I can't tell you how many times my atheist friends have confidently said to me “religion is the cause of every major conflict in the world.”

## \*A Generation of Bridge Builders

So we need to flip things on their head. Change the conversation. People need to hear **the compassionate voice of religion**. We must create a new social movement that transforms the way religion is seen in our society. To do this we need to allow our traditions to flourish through us. We must embody the qualities we want to see. Be the change as the saying goes. And this is only possible if we work together across traditions. It can't be passive. We need to unlock the potential of our religious traditions to inspire and mobilize us. We need to become people who are **militantly generous; extremists of kindness** and **fundamentally forgiving**.

[PAUSE]

After meeting the Sheikh I returned home inspired and ready to roll up my sleeves. I searched for what was going on in Melbourne and signed up for every interfaith event and program happening. I attended meetings, joined groups. But I was a little bit deflated. All around me religion was framed as just another form of cultural diversity. To my mind it was so much more.

It was then I realised that this kind of religious co-operation wasn't going to happen on its own. The "grown ups" certainly weren't going to do it. **We had to build it**. So that got me asking, how do social movements happen?

## \*VIDEO – how to build a movement

You have to be a little bit crazy right?! We all want to change the world. But we have to think global and act local. In fact the local is where the global happens; there's no such place as 'global'! If we love the rolling stones we go out and we start our own band.

So I decided to be the first follower. And I started interAction.

## \* InterAction

**Brings young people from different backgrounds and beliefs to act together for the common good.**

We have the word "action" in our name. When we were deciding what we wanted to be there was a feeling that dialogue didn't get you very far. That often you come together and yes you might have a good conversation but that didn't really translate into action. So we very consciously chose to go with a model that we call the **dialogue-of-doing**. This means that when we come together primarily to do service. The conversations still happen but they happen in the garden, or while you're painting a fence. Knowledge creates tolerance by **experience of the other fosters genuine friendship**. These

friendships are resilient in moments of tension. And in the process we get to have a tangible impact with our projects, improve people's lives and make a real difference. Being **youth run** we devise our own projects and we have a certain sense of ownership over them. We learn from one another and share new ideas. We get to have load of fun! However because we are all young it also means there is often a lack of experience, particularly with organisational stuff.

\*

MONASH TRAINING

\*

COMMUNITY GARDEN EVENT

\*

IGNITE CLOTHING DRIVE

\*

For 2011 we have some **new plans...** We are developing our own training program for **universities**. We are going to be continuing a focus on **service** taking out a food van and staffing it with interfaith volunteers to feed the Melbourne homeless. And we will be running a **campaign** around shared value of compassion!

**\*VIDEO - faith in action**

**\* Ali's story**

One of our founders is a young muslim guy called Ali. Ali grew up in Pakistan. One night, when Ali was just 4 the police came dragged his dad away. Ali's father was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death. [PAUSE] After bribing his way out of gaol the family fled the country. Now Ali works with us promoting interfaith co-operation because he never again wants someone else to go through what he went through.

What distinguishes those in Ali's story with Sheikh Hamza Yusef? It's not what faith they subscribe to. It's the values they embody.

**\*COMPASSION is Golden**

Have a look at these. Quotes from texts

*HINDUISM* "This is the sum of duty, do naught unto others what you would not have

them do unto you." - *Mahabharata* 5:1517

JUDAISM "That which is hateful to you do not do to your fellow. This is the entire law, all the rest is commentary." - *Hillel in the Talmud for the Sabbath* 31a

ZOROASTRIANISM "That nature alone is good that refrains from doing to another whatsoever is not good for itself." - *Dadisten-I-dinik* 94:5

BUDDHISM "Since others too care for their own selves, those who care for themselves should care for others." *Udanavaraga* 5:20

JAINISM "A man should wander about treating all creatures as he would be treated" - *Sutrakritanga* 1.11:33

DAOISM "Regard your neighbours gain as your gain, and your neighbours loss as your loss." - *Tai Shan Kan Ying P'ien*

CONFUCIANISM "Do not do to others what you would not like yourself. Then there will be no resentment against you either in the family or the state." - *Analects* 12:2

CHRISTIANITY "So in everything do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." - *Matt* 7:12

ISLAM "No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself." - *Hadith of al Nawawi* 13

These ideas which are common across all major religious traditions. Each religion works at promoting warm-heartedness and positive values. Considering this we begin to see that we are not divided so strongly by religious lines as we might think. From understanding our shared values we begin to see each other as allies and friends. We really want the same thing, so how can we work together to make this happen?

What if the world's 1 billion Christians and 1.2 billion Muslims decided that their work together in the world was going to be ending Poverty or Climate Change or Malaria. If that energy currently spent on suspicion on ignorance on hatred was entirely devoted to co-operation!

## \*So What Next?

Turn to the person next to you and tell them what you want to change in the world? What gets you fired up and passionate? And tell them what you think should be done. 2Mins!

If we can identify a shared vision we can work together to make it a reality. Acting together we are able to work at meeting common social problems. Teaming up with your interfaith allies makes your work stronger! Serving together is a non-threatening approach to interfaith so more people will want to get involved.

4 simple steps

1. Find an interfaith ally.
2. Look at the world and find an issue that concerns you!
3. Reflect on how your individual faith calls you to do something about it
4. Do something about it!

## CONCLUSION!

My Buddhist teacher often says that worlds religions are like the different items on the menu at a nice restaurant. You should get something off the menu that's going to be tasty and nutritious for you. Right now most people are stuck arguing about over which is the best dish, and eating nothing. Well this is ridiculous! Instead, it's entirely possibly to share the same table, eat our own meal and come away feeling mutually nourished.

So lets bring it back to basics.

**NOTES:**

What I want them to hear:

- religion is relevant in today's world
- youth and their allies.

Powerpoint: simple. Impactful. Fun.

Videos

JewBu's and the diaspora of faith.

Storytelling.

Being truly religious means being engaged in the world, kind, and compassionate.

Why must we work together?

The power of your story.

One of my nicknames was free-man-della

- **INSPIRATIONS:** experience made me realise that while the difference in the concepts and conventions provides different ways of accessing this essential truth.  
"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Matt. 5:8 Beatitudes  
"All creatures are God's children and those dearest to God are those who treat his children kindly" Prophet Mohammed.

"love of all creatures is also love of God, for whoever loves the One God loves all the works that he has made." *Neisvos Olam, Ahaves Harei, 1*

- **PRACTICALSITES:** InterActions original funders were the Multicultural Commission of our state government.  
There is a certain value in being **youth run**. We devise our own project and we have a certain sense of ownership over them. We learn from one another and share new ideas. We get to have loads of fun! However because we are all young it also means there is often a lack of skill within our organisation, particularly with organisational stuff. This is why interfaith allies are so important. Don't forget your golden oldies!

## CONFERENCE (Sun)

- 15min presentation
- **Facilitate workshop “Are we achieving the MDG's - do they matter and why?”**  
Put people into groups. Give them some time to chew into it and find out what they want to do? Be realistic. I am to give them the brief outline. Actions that young people will need to do themselves. Actions that the network themselves might take. Some solid things coming out so that then post-conference they can be sure who needs to do what?
- Panel Discussion “How can interfaith dialogue contribute to Human Rights Education?” sharing examples and suggestions.
- Evening Lecture (30-40mins?)

## AUCKLAND

- I will be talking about the relationship between faith & social action. How interfaith co-operation can solve many of our common problems.
- Pretty casual style. Speak for up to 15mins. Then questions and World Cafe style conversations.
- Chat with buddhist students also while there.

What are the challenges for the next 10 years?

What are the opportunities to tap into?

How do the youth fit in?

Success stories from Melbourne. What works?

Auckland Forum on Sunday a **mixture of audience** – people who have attended a number of forums. Some with have knowledge of interfaith but no experience. Oldies as well as young ones. Majority is still Christian-based.

Do I need a Powerpoint? Data Projector? Butchers paper?

For each group give them some paper and pens to write.