

Media release – 28 August 2017



Youth PoWR 'Light in Dark Times' Sparking an Interfaith Movement of Hope

More than 200 young people participated in this year's Youth PoWR (Parliament of the World's Religions) at Strathfield on Sunday 20 August.

Now in its third year, Youth PoWR is a multi-faith initiative of the Columban Mission Institute's Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations. It brings together young people from diverse religions – Aboriginal, Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism – and secular society.

This year's Youth PoWR was sponsored by The Glenburnie Program, the NSW Government through Multicultural NSW, and Saint Columban's Mission Society.

Youth PoWR is **by young people** – the members of the Coordinating Committee are young representatives from different religions who plan, organise, promote and host the event; **with young people** – the speakers and performers are young people; **for young people** – the participants are young people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds across Sydney.

The venue was Santa Sabina College, where young people aged 17-35 engaged with each other on the practical implications of this year's theme, 'Light in Dark Times'.

In a video message from Chicago, Rev Dr Larry Greenfield, Executive Director of the Parliament of the World's Religions, had a positive and encouraging message for the participants.

Dr Greenfield said he was keen to listen and learn from this gathering of Australian youth from different religions, and extended an invitation to join him and others from around the world at next year's Parliament of the World's Religions to be held in November in Toronto, Canada.

The program featured inspiring talks, dynamic performances expressing compassion and justice in artistic form, and great engagement of the young people with each other.

The program included speakers from four faiths: Leonard Choy (Buddhism), Rabbi Nicole Roberts (Judaism) Matin Gouniai (Baha'i) and Sourosh Cina (Islam). There were performances from Hope Uniting Band (Christian), Natyanivedan Indian Dance School (Hindu) and Shaheedi Faujan Gatka Akhara (Sikh).

Participants gathered in small groups and considered a range of issues. **Racism and Discrimination** and **Climate Change and the Environment** emerged as the two most important issues to them and to young people in their faith community. The group participants then

discussed their chosen issue in depth and came up with one concrete, practical action to address that issue. The entire gathering then voted on the action proposals.

Through meeting, discussing and agreeing on shared commitments, the members of Youth PoWR demonstrated how young people from different religions can model harmonious interreligious living for the rest of the world to emulate.

You can stay in touch with Youth PoWR through the Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/Youth.PoWR/>

Some of the comments from participants:

“This kind of event is a good platform for young people to meet, experience and discuss. Keep having Youth PoWR every year!”

“The speakers were very good and their talks were complementary.”

“The entertainment was excellent. Starting off with a calming performance and ending with something exciting worked very well.”

Some of the ways to foster interfaith relations can include:

- Meet and greet your neighbours and work colleagues from other religions; be friendly, a smile can make a world of difference; offer congratulations for a wedding or a birth; offer condolences on a death.
- Learn about the faiths of others from a reliable source; the best way to break down stereotypes is to meet with one of the faithful, so that their religion is not just an idea, but has a face and a name.
- Be curious; ask questions; do not be invasive, but a sincere, respectful enquiry will almost always allay fears, elicit a genuine response and lead to better mutual understanding.

To download a gallery of press-quality photos click [here](#). Where images are used, a credit would be appreciated.

Images: Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations.

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