

Religious and political leaders break bread in shadow of deadly wars

Australia's political and religious leaders broke bread inside Parliament House for the seventh ACU Interfaith Parliamentary Breakfast.

For the first time in its seven-year history, the Interfaith Breakfast was co-hosted by the Speaker of the House of Representatives Milton Dick MP. Cabinet Minister Chris Bowen, representing Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, and Shadow Defence Minister Andrew Hastie, representing Opposition Leader Peter Dutton, also addressed more than 200 guests including parliamentarians and faith community leaders in the Great Hall at Parliament House.

In welcoming guests to Parliament House, Mr Dick said Australia's national identity was tied closely with the country's diverse religious and faith communities sitting in the room.

"If we can hold this event every day of a sitting week, I think our nation would be a lot stronger," he said.

"When we all serve together, we can build stronger and resilient communities of mutual trust and most importantly respect."

As the Member for the diverse electorate of McMahon, in Western Sydney, Mr Bowen acknowledged the Interfaith Breakfast was being held at a difficult time many Australians, who clung on to their faith to cope with the devastations.

"I know for so many Australians with ties of faith and family in the Middle East that every day since we've been confronted by terrible scenes of death and devastation," Mr Bowen said.

"These are times that try our soul, these are moments that can test our faith in God, our faith in each other, or our faith in humanity.

"These are moments when we're asked to trust in a substance of things hoped for, in evidence of things not seen, to believe, when things are the darkest, that a new day will come."

For former military officer Mr Hastie, the Interfaith Breakfast took him back to his childhood. As the son of a Presbyterian minister, he witnessed his father working with faith leaders and politicians to serve the diverse community of Ashfield.

"In our church we had an English service, a Korean service, a Mandarin-Chinese service, and a Western Samoan service - it was a great picture of diversity as those congregations met within the confines of a Victorian church built in the late 1880s," he said.

Mr Hastie delivered a speech on behalf of the Opposition Leader, who was a last-minute apology. Mr Dutton referred to Australia as a nation of many ancestries and faiths "precisely because of the Judeo-Christian values at the heart of our democracy".

Mr Dutton had thanked the more than 80 faith leaders who showed strong moral courage by attending the Interfaith Breakfast.

Leaders from 10 religions and faith communities led the room in separate prayers from their own tradition, including:

- The Right Reverend Carol Wagner, Vicar General, Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn
- Dr Mohamed Mohideen OAM JP, Commissioner, Victorian Multicultural Commission (Muslim)
- His Grace Bishop Bartholomew, Vicar of Canberra, Tasmania and Regional NSW, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia (Greek Orthodox)
- Dr Natalie Mobini-Kesheh, National Secretary, Australian Baha'i Community (Baha'i)
- Most Reverend Timothy Costelloe SDB, Archbishop of Perth, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (Catholic)
- Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay OLM DD STD MA, Bishop, Maronite Catholic Diocese of Australia (Maronite)
- Reverend Sharon Hollis, National President, Uniting Church in Australia (Uniting)

- Pandi Ramachandra Athreiya and Pandit Rami Sivan, Australian Council of Hindu Clergy
- Most Reverend Amel Nona, Archbishop of the Chaldean Church in Australia and New Zealand (Chaldean)
- Rabbi Dr Benjamin Elton, Chief Minister, The Great Synagogue (Jewish)

Initiated in 2014, ACU's Parliamentary Interfaith Breakfast celebrates the diverse contribution faith communities have made on Australia's national fabric. It has become a popular forum for interfaith dialogue and fosters positive engagement between the country's political and religious leaders.

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