

DUNEDIN ABRAHAMIC INTERFAITH GROUP (DAIG)

www.dunedininterfaith.net.nz

Report for 1st AGM 14 March 2010 by Greg Hughson

Our group was formed here in Dunedin in response to the events of September 11th 2001. Tonight, over eight years later our group is still going and this is our first ever AGM! One significant development which has occurred over the last year or so is that we have realised that we need to be “incorporated” so as to be able to apply for funding. This means that we have needed to prepare a constitution (which we have done) and have an AGM. Our group is moving into a new stage of its life where we are (necessarily) becoming more formal in some ways. Personally, it gives me great satisfaction to look back over all that we have been able to do together since 2001. Along the way, many of us have become good friends. DAIG provides the opportunity for Jewish, Christian and Muslim people to meet together and share what is most important to us. We are people of three faiths, brought together by our common desire to work together for increased interfaith understanding, respect and peace in our community and world. Our meetings provide a context within which we can all share what we have been doing, and what is coming up. Together we share serious concerns about ecological and peace issues all around the planet.

In this report I will highlight some of the events and developments during 2009 and 2010.

At the beginning of last year we intentionally moved to alternating the chairing of each of our monthly meetings between a representative of each of our three faiths. We also began the process of alternating our meeting times between lunchtime and late-afternoon time slots to enable more of our members to attend.

Paul Sorrell represented DAIG at the February 2009 National NZ Interfaith Conference in Auckland, and Kevin Toomey represented us at the February 2010 Conference in Christchurch.

At our regular meetings we share invitations with each other to participate in a wide range of events. We have been invited to share Hannukah, Ramadan celebrations, participate in “Walk for the Planet”, support programmes such as “Buzz off” (malaria control), provide speakers for Hospital Chaplaincy volunteer training, and to provide advice to the Prison chaplaincy service.

It has been wonderful since late-2008 to welcome Mai and Nasser Tamimi, from Palestine as active members of our group. Mai has spoken to groups in Waimate, the Methodist Parish and other groups on her work with Save the Children in Palestine. We were all invited to the Mosque to share a special celebration of Malak Tamimi’s birth - a wonderful time together. Each member of our group has been able to share their talents and

interests with us, such as Simon Rae's paper on "Meeting the Muslim Jesus – the Challenge for Christian Theology"

A significant project for us in recent times has to prepare a brochure. A grant of \$1,000 has been obtained to pay for this, via the Methodist Church PAC Educational fund.

Each year since 2004 we have arranged an annual peace lecture in association with Otago Tertiary Chaplaincy. We alternate each year between a Jewish, Christian and Muslim Peace lecturer. Our 2009 Peace lecturer was Rabbi Johanna Hershenson from Wellington. Our dream continues to be to have Yusuf Islam deliver a Peace lecture in Dunedin. Two years ago I presented an official invitation to Yusuf's Public Relations Officer in London.

We are available to arrange interfaith delegations to speak in local High Schools. In recent times we have spoken at Logan Park and John McGlashan schools. Last October we arranged a delegation to speak to an Otago Polytechnic Management class, and were very well received.

Last year we facilitated the preparation of a two articles in the ODT, on the activities of the local Jewish and Muslim communities.

Robert Paterson's autobiography *Kowhai and Orchid* was published last year, providing a great insight into Robert's life in Indonesia.

Members of our group help provide an "Abrahamic presence" at the International Expo for University students at the beginning of each semester on campus and speakers for the annual St Margarets college interfaith information night.

Our first ever DAIG retreat which was held at Fliss Butcher's place on Sunday 21st June. This retreat was very successful and enabled us to get to know each other better. We began work on our constitution at this retreat. 15 or so members attended. A project which came out of our retreat was the idea of a DAIG cookbook.

Last year Rabbi Shmule Koppel came to Dunedin. The Chabad Group of Otago led by Rabbi Shmule Koppel now has a confirmed presence in Dunedin with a centre in George St (see www.jewishotago.com). Rabbi Koppel attended our retreat last year, and has come to some of our meetings. We welcome him and his family to Dunedin.

Whenever one of our members is successful or reaches a turning point we congratulate them, such as when Jacky Zvulun and Mohammed Alqumber received their PhD's. We are also sensitive to the times when members of our group have experienced bereavements. Each meeting recently seems to begin with congratulations! Mohammed Alqumber and his family returned to Saudi Arabia last week.

We have greatly appreciated having some University students as members of our committee, but also we are keen to support the recently established Dunedin Abrahamic Students Interfaith Group, which has taken the place of the Dunedin branch of YALCA (Young Abrahamic Leadership Council of Australasia) which stopped meeting some time ago. DASIG have a Facebook page

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/group.php?gid=329928571971&ref=ts>

Eleven students attended the latest DASIG meeting on campus (13/4) and a trip to the Mosque is planned for the next meeting.

At each of our DAIG meetings we share significant events which are coming up, for example the programme for Islam Awareness Week (IAW) each year and the Week of Prayer for World Peace gatherings in Dunedin (for which we supply speakers) Members of DAIG have helped organise and lead an annual Muslim-Christian dialogue on campus during IAW in recent years.

Kevin Toomey attended the Parliament of World Religious gathering in Melbourne during December 2009 . We hope to arrange an open meeting soon at which Kevin (and Rod Mitchell) can share about this important gathering.

Each year in December we gather in the Botanical gardens (Crocodile café) for a Sunday afternoon tea .

I would like to take this opportunity to formally and sincerely thank Dr Paul Sorrell who has been the secretary of DAIG for six years. Paul is retiring from this position at this AGM. As a group we are truly grateful Paul for all your wisdom, experience, friendship and reliable minute taking throughout your time as secretary.

Shalom, Peace, Salam

Greg Hughson

14 April 2010



www.otago.ac.nz/chaplain

www.dunedinjewish.org.nz

<http://otagomusa.wordpress.com/>

Report on activities during 2010

2010 was once again a busy year for members of the Dunedin Abrahamic Interfaith Group. Our meetings have continued on a monthly basis. We have been pleased to welcome several new members. We visited two High Schools (Logan Park and John McGlashan) . We shared a meal at the Mosque at the end of Ramadan. We promoted an interfaith forum at the Mornington Methodist Church , and interfaith dialogues on our Otago University campus. Our annual peace lecture (12 July) was delivered by Professor Chaiwat Satha-Anand from Bangkok entitled “**The Jahiliyya Factor?: Fighting Muslims' Cultural Resistance to Nonviolence**” This lecture was very well received and is available to read on our website. We are soon to reprint three of Professor Satha-Anand’s Peace articles for wide distribution.

In recent times we have produced a brochure, funded by a grant from the Methodist Church. Copies will be available at the National Conference. Members of our group are available for consultation on a wide range of issues. Our secretary (Mai Tamimi) has for example been consulted about *halal* food in catering and issues relating to the Muslim prayer rooms on campus. Mai has also spoken to a number of community groups in Dunedin. As a result of one talk , our group received a donation towards our cookbook project. Dr Najib Lfraie, a member of our group recently responded to an invitation to visit the Milton prison , and to advise the prison authorities and prison chaplains on issues relating to Islam. From time to time we are contacted by interfaith groups overseas, via our website.

We also arrange committees interested in certain projects , involving people from different faiths. (such as our cookbook project)

Through the year we have continued to support the Dunedin Abrahamic Students Interfaith Group (DASIG). (See <http://www.facebook.com/#!/group.php?gid=329928571971>) We helped DASIG organise a lecture on 17 May by Rabbi Niles Goldstein from New York, “Mysticism in the Abrahamic Faiths”

We enjoyed a number of meals and gatherings together during the year, including an end of year afternoon tea at the Dunedin Botanic Gardens (see photo on our website)

It is our intention to continue to promote peace and justice in all our dealings with each other. In response to negative portrayals of our three faiths we are in the process of gathering good news stories to put on our website . We will continue to visit schools, arrange interfaith dialogues and peace lectures.

Greg Hughson - Chairperson
Mai Tamimi - Secretary
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