

The Inspiration Behind the Charter and the Process So Far.

A Short Address at the Launch of the Faith Friendly Charter by Hieu Van Le,
Chairman of the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission
(SAMEAC) at the Multifaith Association Symposium, October 4, 2010
Geoff Boyce.

About four years ago the Hindu Chaplain at Flinders University, Dr Carl Belle, and I simultaneously came across a report about faith in the workplace from a most unlikely source – CNN Money!

The significance of the report to both of us was that top Executives in the USA were recognising the contribution faith makes in the workplace and were being proactive in capitalising on it. This contrasted with our traditional Australian practice of relegating faith to the private sphere.

The timing of this discovery coincided with movements going on in the UK at the time of the retirement of Tony Blair. He tells, having visited communities across the UK during his time as Prime Minister, how impressed he was with the contribution faith groups make to community life – soup kitchens, community centres and so on caring for the needy, the distressed and marginalised, for example. As a result of these observations he launched the Tony Blair Faith Foundation. His rationale? Religion can be used for good or bad. Why not encourage the good?

This was the insight within the CNN Money report – with a monetary bottom line.

When I discussed this with Norm Habel four years ago he also saw its significance. So how could, what was being called “faith friendliness”, be encouraged?

Most people don’t know it, but 20 years ago, Norm was inspirational in developing the *Earth Charter*, which was eventually adopted by the United Nations.

So I shouldn’t have been surprised that it wasn’t long before Norm had translated the idea of faith friendliness into a Charter that could be adopted by communities – workplaces, schools, sports groups – any group of people. I think it was Nicholas who came up with the idea of Adelaide itself being such a group and declaring itself a Faith Friendly City – the first in the world!

But I wonder what this would mean in practice.

It might at least mean that we might be taken beyond *The City Of Churches* – a Christian paradigm – to Adelaide seeing itself and *naming* itself a multifaith friendly city!

Norm’s Faith Friendly Charter had been on the table for a couple of years, but the idea of faith friendliness was beginning to gather momentum. So in November last year it seemed opportune to gather a group together to develop Norm’s Charter and see what we could do with it.

Today we meet to launch our work into the public domain.

I am excited to be here to take this historic next step. I am excited about the Charter because it potentially normalises interfaith relationships in the community. It takes us beyond interfaith dialogue. It takes us beyond religious professionals. It potentially takes us beyond the meeting hall and religious communities who have been made to feel they have to defend themselves. It is a vehicle that may be used to encourage openness and respect among all people, of faith or no faith.

I hope you will join with us in the next step - to take this Charter into our various communities and work for its adoption in ways appropriate for each of our communities. Members of the Working Group would be delighted to talk with you about any aspect of the Charter and its implementation.

So what might this look like in practice?

I now invite Nicholas Rundle to speak to us about how he has seen faith friendliness at work during a visit to the US.