

8.2 MEMBERSHIP TO THE PARTNER CITIES NETWORK OF THE COUNCIL FOR A PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS (COM78; EG)

Submitting Councillor: Cr Paul Klisaris

NOTICE OF MOTION

That Council note that the Monash Interfaith Gathering will pursue the processes involved in becoming a member of the Partner Cities Network of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to advise that the Monash Interfaith Gathering will pursue the processes involved in becoming a member of the Partner Cities Network of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions.

BACKGROUND

The Partner Cities Network is an initiative developed by the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions. The Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions was created to cultivate harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities and foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions in order to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world.

It is anticipated that the Partner Cities Network initiative will be launched in Australia during the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions to be held in Melbourne 3-9 December.

DISCUSSION

According to the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, the Partner Cities Network strategy in partnering with cities around the world is to create a network that facilitates the sharing of best practices and opportunities for cooperative action.

Becoming a Partner City provides local cities with opportunities to:

- enter into a consultative relationship to assist in organising or enhancing local metropolitan interfaith movements;
- join a networking relationship with local movements in other Partner Cities;
- make visible the collective efforts of local interfaith movements in the world;
- take part in a collaborative relationship to make the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions to be held in Melbourne on 3-9 December a catalyst for local interfaith movements;
- leverage the name, offices, resources and expertise of the Council and its partners for the enhancement of the interfaith movement in local cities;

- promote dialogue and cooperation among diverse religious and spiritual communities in each Partner City in ways that are appropriate to the local context;
- share the learnings, methodologies, and experience from each site with other Partner Cities; and
- facilitate and encourage interaction between Partner Cities to uncover shared aspirations and create opportunities for collaborative action on issues of common concern.

Monash City Council is committed to cultural, linguistic and religious diversity and to the promotion of inclusion, respect, understanding and community harmony. This is articulated in Council's Plan 2006-2010 and its Multicultural Framework and Action Plan 2006-2008. The City of Monash is a culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse community and is ranked as the 5th highest Local Government Area in Victoria in terms of its cultural diversity, with 39.7% of the Monash population being born overseas; 29.5 % is born in a non-English speaking country; 33.8% speak a language other than English at home; and 76% are affiliated with a religious faith:

- 26.5% Catholic
- 12.5% Anglican
- 9.3% Orthodox
- 6.2% Uniting Church
- 4.1% Buddhism
- 2.1% Hinduism; and
- 1.4% Islam.

This diversity is an asset, which needs to be harnessed, nurtured and promoted by Council. Equally, it presents Council with opportunities and challenges with respect to how it engages and communicates with its diverse community and how it plans and develops policies, programs and services to meet the current and future diverse needs and aspirations of the community.

Council is well placed to provide strong leadership in multicultural development including facilitating community relations to ensure that the Monash community continues to be harmonious, engaged, productive, healthy and peaceful. Council has already in place a number of structures that are considered to be best practice in strengthening multicultural development at the local level. These include the Multicultural Framework and Action Plan 2006-2008; the Monash Interfaith Gathering and the Multicultural Advisory Committee. Council is also a signatory to the Community Accord, which was signed on 9 May 2005 and is a Refugee Welcome Zone, signed on 20 June 2002.

Membership by the Monash Interfaith Gathering to the Partner Cities Network would further enhance and strengthen Council's and the Gathering's work in multicultural and interfaith development. It would also enable Council to showcase and share with other like organisations in Australia and globally, current good practice models supported and implemented by Monash City Council and explore opportunities for cooperation and partnership development.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The recommendation to explore joining the Partner Cities Network is in line with the Council Plan 2006-2010, Council's Multicultural Framework and Action Plan 2006-2008 and the Community Accord.

The process of the Monash Interfaith Gathering becoming a member of the Partner Cities Network entails a self-assessment of its local development. Once a city successfully completes this self-assessment, it formally becomes a part of the Partner Cities Network. Through the Network, local inter-religious movements would have an opportunity to share their expertise, which would be identified through the self-assessment process, with other cities in the Partner Cities Network.

The self-assessment process consists of five steps as follows:

History & Demographics

Provision of a brief history of the local area with particular reference on religious and spiritual diversity; ethnic and cultural diversity; and economic and political diversity. Also on how was the local Interfaith Gathering formed, its purpose and how its composition reflects the local community.

Community Dynamics

Description of community dynamics with reference to interactions, tensions, issues and opportunities that emerge in the local community and how are people engaging and addressing these dynamics.

Current Activities

Description of current activities undertaken at the local level, including projects and other initiatives and how are these being supported. Also an indication of how the local Interfaith Gathering is engaging and cooperating with other like Networks in the region, state and or nationally.

Vision for the Future

Description of the vision for the future regarding the role of the Interfaith Gathering and how it could be used as a model to influence positively the development of relationships between religious, faith and cultural communities at the state and national and or international levels. Also what resources might be required to achieve and sustain this vision.

Evaluate & Measure

Provide information on how interfaith activities will be measured for their impact and how will this information be shared with Council and the broader community and other Interfaith Networks.

FINANCIAL

The recommendation in this report can be met within existing resources.

CONCLUSION

It is recommended that Council support the proposal to join the Partner Cities Network, as it will strengthen Council's current work in multicultural and interfaith development.