

Dialogue builds bridges



The term 'interfaith dialogue' sums up both the objective and the process of a recently concluded program known as Building Bridges. Following an announcement in Assembly by Rev. Howard Wilkins, several Carey students indicated interest in participating in the program, which had its beginnings with Dr Tim McCowan at the WellSpring Centre, an ecumenical organisation associated with the Ashburton Baptist Church.

The WellSpring Centre's objective is to provide 'space and support within a Christian

context to those who wish to deepen their awareness of the presence of God and to follow the implications of this in everyday life in ways that are just, compassionate, healing and reconciling.' Building Bridges fulfilled just such an objective, bringing together as it did Christian students from Carey, Muslim students from King

Khalid College in Coburg, and Jewish students from Bialik College in East Hawthorn for a series of four weekly sessions in which skills that foster understanding were introduced and explored.

The first session focused on creating a place of safety and respect; the second on a comparison of faith and values commitments; the third on listening skills and how to listen without criticising or compromising one's own beliefs; the fourth on the role of diversity in creating community and co-operation.

The first three sessions were held at each of the three participating schools and the final one at Hawthorn Town Hall. At each session participants engaged in discussions in small groups and reassembled into a large group in which the evening's developments were shared and assessed.

One of the Carey participants was Rokimi Khawhring, an exchange student from Kodaikanal, India. A paragraph in her written response to the program says a lot about it: 'I really feel that we have started something good here – a very small step, but a step all the same, towards a better understanding between the peoples of the world. I have found that these kids from other religions and backgrounds are, contrary to my initial beliefs, normal kids just like me. It doesn't really matter what our faiths are because ultimately, we are of the same human race and that is what inevitably binds us together. I feel kinda sad because this interfaith thing is now over, but I also feel rather happy that it happened.'

8th Annual William Carey Lecture



Thursday 19 August,
7.30pm, MGH

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Why is sexuality 'the line in the sand'?

Dr Porter writes for The Age as a regular 'Opinion' columnist, as well as for other local and overseas papers. She is the author of several books including *Women in the Church*, *The Great Ordination Debate in Australia*, and *Sex, Marriage and the Church: Patterns of Change*. Her latest book, *Sex, Power and the Clergy*, was published in 2003.