

CWM CALLS FOR INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT TOWARDS BUILDING LIFE AFFIRMING COMMUNITIES



We the participants of the consultation on 'Interfaith engagement towards building life-affirming communities' held in Kolkata between the 6th and 8th of November 2015 recognise the inevitable need to build life-affirming communities and acknowledge that this is only possible through collaboration and conversation between faiths rather than through conflict and combat.

Following a process of dialogue and debate, characterised by honesty, openness and a commitment to walking together, over the course of the last three days we deliberated on the following questions: What would be appropriate religious resources for building life-affirming communities? What would be the structure and shape of life-affirming communities in our contemporary context(s)?

With the acknowledgement that the promise and possibility of building life-affirming communities lies in the fact that what unites people of faith is far greater than what separates us we offer the following words of affirmation and challenge:

- Recognising diversity as a gift shared by the one humanity, and as being foundational for the sustenance of our common life together on earth, we affirm that it is imperative for *all people of faith* as well as *people of all faiths and none* to make diversity the cornerstone for building life-affirming communities. How we can we build further on our differences, diversities and divergences without resorting to naïve reductionism, parochial essentialism and untenable universalism remains very much a challenge of our times.
- During the course of our joint deliberations we are convinced that the ground for life-affirming communities are respect for the sanctity of all life, protection of religious freedom and human dignity. It is encouraging that these qualities constitute the core

of our faith traditions. The challenge before us is how do we re-invent these qualities in response to the signs of our times?

- Life-affirming communities cannot be built through divisive walls of exclusivism, discrimination, hatred and prejudice which divide human communities but rather through the protection of human right to life, religious freedom and the inherent worth of all.
- We recognise our rich spiritual and ritual traditions as windows which offer us fresh glimpses of the divine as well as providing vision for the way towards the affirmation of life. In the context of empire where economic and ecological exploitation intersects with political and social interests there is need for religious communities to re-identity ourselves as responsible and response-able communities able to respond critically to economic and ecological challenges of a consumeristic and capitalist world order.
- Life affirming communities are characterised by open doors of welcome and inclusivity. Upon entering these doors we *meet* and not *miss* the other, we *receive* and do not *reject* the other. Through sustained conversation and strategic collaborative action we make friends out of strangers.
- Building life affirming communities involves the hard work of cementing the bricks of shared learning, enlightened unlearning, strategies for holistic living both individual and corporate, a liberative solidarity and an engaged spirituality. Once constructed through persistence and perseverance life-affirming communities offer safe spaces for harmonious living where hope for the wellbeing and wholeness of all life is re-born through our diverse faiths, common hope and shared love.

At the meeting we discussed the architecture of what our way forward would look like. It was decided

- That it was necessary to build networks of solidarity between those of different faiths who are committed to building life affirming communities
- That it is necessary to create publications that speak to the issue boldly and clearly
- That it is necessary to revive alternative and subaltern traditions that lie outside of the dogmatic frameworks of dominant religious discourses
- That it is necessary to do empirical work to excavate the realities of multiple religious belongings
- That to work with students and young people to create and sustain a culture of interfaith listening and engagement
- That to create spaces, both academic and otherwise which would allow for the engagement of seminary students of all religious traditions

8th November, 2015
Kolkata, India