

Hindu-Catholic Dialogue in Canada



Day of Hindu-Christian Dialogue at Ram Mandir (Hindu Temple) in Mississauga, Canada (October 2014)

“God has so ordered this world that no one can keep his goodness or badness exclusively to himself. The whole world is like the human body with its various members. Pain in one member is felt in the whole body. Rot in one part must inevitably poison the whole system.” (Way to God: The Selected Writings from Mahatma Gandhi, 1971)

Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948)

“By dialogue, we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves to one another, we open ourselves to God.” (Speech in Madras, India, 1986)

Pope John Paul II (1920-2005)

Hindu-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada

Canada is widely, and rightly, recognized as one of the most multicultural countries in the world. The Catholic and Hindu communities of Canada value this diversity and wish to maintain harmonious interreligious relations. For these reasons, and obedient to the call for interreligious dialogue articulated by the Bishops of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the Episcopal Commission for Christian Unity, Religious Relations with the Jews, and Interfaith Dialogue of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has joined in partnership with the Hindu Federation of Canada, the International Society of Krishna Consciousness and other members of the Hindu community to initiate a national Hindu-Catholic Dialogue. Members of this Dialogue meet as equal partners, with mutual respect for each other as individuals and for each other's sacred traditions.

Co-Chairs: Bishop Daniel Miehme, Diocese of Hamilton
Professor Tinu Ruparell, University of Calgary

Purpose of the Hindu-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada

- To engage in dialogue, seeking mutual understanding, respect and enrichment.
- To enter together into sacred space, experiencing something of each other's spirituality and religious beliefs.
- To identify issues of common concern, including but not limited to questions of multiculturalism, accommodation, and the transmission of our traditions to younger generations.
- To witness to our convictions and to learn from one another about the unity and diversity within and between our respective traditions.
- To serve as a catalyst for Hindu-Christian dialogue and for building mutual understanding in other contexts.

History of the Group

This dialogue group took shape in a series of consultations among representatives of the sponsoring organizations, between 2011 and 2012, resulting in an approved Memorandum of Understanding in November 2012. The first formal meeting was convened on 26 January 2013, and the group has met biannually since that time. Dialogues thus far have included the sharing of spiritual journeys, presentations and discussions on rituals of initiation, distinctness and diversity, community life, religious responses to suffering, and representations of the other in our traditions, as well as an open conversation with the noted Canadian ethnographer and scholar of Hinduism, Paul Younger. In October 2014, the group hosted a wider Hindu-Christian dialogue on the topics of growing up in a religious tradition, ecological justice and prayer.

Summary of the 2014 Hindu-Christian Dialogue Events

In two events in the Fall of 2014, over forty Hindus and Christians from throughout the Greater Toronto Area and beyond gathered to share food and to dialogue on our shared journeys of faith.

On a Saturday, at the Mississauga Ram Mandir, participants listened to brief presentations on growing up in these two traditions from Kevala Bhakti Das, North American Director of Communications for the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, and Nisheeta Menon, a Religion teacher in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic Board, as well as perspectives on ecological justice by Bishop Daniel Miehm of Hamilton and Dr. Tinu Ruparell of the University of Calgary.

On a Wednesday evening, at St. Patrick's Church in Mississauga, Swamini Shivapriyananda of the Chinmaya Mission and Kathy Murtha of Scarboro Missions spoke on the question, "How and Why do I Pray?" The dialogues were punctuated by rich sharing in small and large groups. Emily Van Berkum, a theology student at the University of St. Michael's College, noted that the speakers "gave insightful presentations that challenged me to articulate my own background in the discussion group. I valued the ample time to share personal stories."

"It was through this dialogue," reflected Kevala Bhakti Das, "that commonality in faith, practice and understanding was found and, after both sessions, I personally felt both inspired in my own practice and appreciative and inspired by the Christian faith. I eagerly await the next opportunity to gather with such a wonderful group of fellow spiritual seekers."



Hindu-Christian Discussion on growing up in each of these faith traditions

FAITH AND ECOLOGY



The Co-Chairs of the Hindu-Roman Catholic Dialogue, **Bishop Daniel Mieh, Diocese of Hamilton** and **Professor Tinu Ruparell, University of Calgary**, present the respective Catholic and Hindu perspectives on ecological justice at the Ram Mandir Temple

“I cannot engage in dialogue if I am closed to others. Openness? Even more: acceptance! Come to my house, enter my heart. My heart welcomes you. It wants to hear you. This capacity for empathy enables a true human dialogue in which words, ideas and questions arise from an experience of fraternity and shared humanity.” (Speech in Bangui, Central African Republic, 2015)

Pope Francis
(1936-)

“The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor is a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.” (Speech at Chicago’s Parliament in the World’s Religions, USA, 1893)

Swami Vivekananda
(1863-1902)



At Ram Mandir Temple, **Kevala Bhakti Das** (left) and **Nisheeta Menon** (right) speak about growing up in their respective faiths in Canada.

Kevala is the community relations officer at the Hare Krishna Temple and Nisheeta teaches in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic School Board.

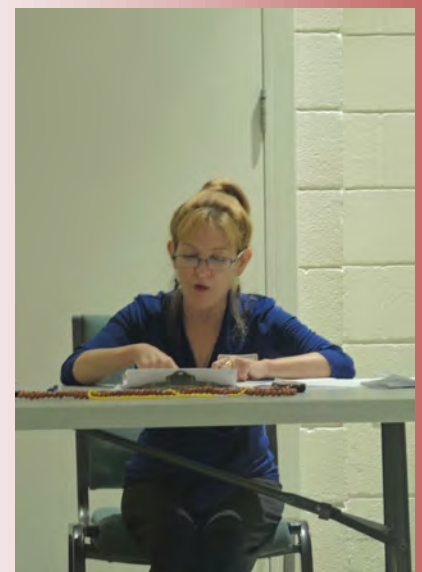


TWO FAITH TRADITIONS TWO DAYS OF ENCOUNTER



At St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, **Swamini Shivapriyananda** and **Kathy Murtha**, present Hindu and Christian perspectives on the theme of "Why and How do I pray?"

Swamini Shivapriyananda teaches at the Chinmaya Mission Toronto. Kathy is a spiritual retreat leader at Scarboro Missions.





Closing circle discussion of dialogue evening at St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church

EVENING AT ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH

"Hindu-Christian dialogue can offer the chance to show millions of Hindus that the Catholic Church has changed its attitudes towards them after the Vatican Council. It has to be not only a philosophical and theological dialogue. It is necessary to engage in common projects to alleviate poverty and exploitation and to ensure a harmonious conviviality among people of different religious traditions."

Roberto Catalano
International Office of Interreligious Dialogue
Focolare, Rome



"There are many commonalities that the Hindu and Christian traditions share: the indwelling presence of the divine, an ancient and well-established mystical as well as monastic tradition, a reverence for revealed scriptures and their study. Sharing our commonalities as well as our areas of difference is an enormously enriching experience, broadening the heart, sharpening the mind and providing us all the opportunity to move from 'other' into 'us.'"

*Pravrajika Vrajaprana
Sarada Convent, Vedanta Society of Southern California
Santa Barbara*



**Evening of dialogue for Hindus and Christians in Saint Patrick's Catholic Church in Mississauga, Canada
(October 2014)**

FOCUS ON INTERFAITH LEADERS

Pandit Roopnauth Sharma

Pandit Sharma is the founder and Spiritual Leader of Mississauga's Ram Mandir, a Hindu temple with a membership of over 3,000 families. An eloquent speaker, he has promoted the Hindu way of life in Canada, the USA and the Caribbean. He is also the driving force behind projects related to family issues, poverty, youth violence and low-income housing. Pandit Sharma is currently involved in the following organizations:

- President – Hindu Federation
- Member – the Credit Valley Spiritual Care Group and the 905 Faith Leaders group that represents the multi-faith communities within Peel Region and surrounding areas
- President – Canadian Multifaith Federation
- Hindu Chaplain – Federal Detention Centre
- President – Canada Hindu Heritage Centre which focuses on the social, economic and cultural needs of the Hindu community
- Member – Hindu-Roman Catholic dialogue of Canada



FOCUS ON INTERFAITH LEADERS



Fr. Damian MacPherson S.A.

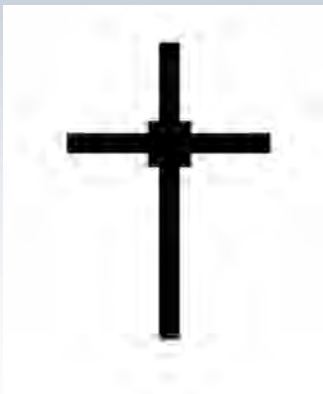
Fr. MacPherson is the director of the Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto.

A member of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement, Rev. MacPherson has made a major contribution to interchurch and interfaith cooperation in the Greater Toronto Area and beyond. He is involved in numerous interfaith organizations including the Jewish-Christian Dialogue of Toronto, the National Muslim-Christian Liaison Committee, the Hindu-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada, the Toronto Area Interfaith Council (founding president), the Greater Toronto Area Council of Christian Churches, and the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation.

Rev. MacPherson, who is very effective in speaking to Catholic audiences about interfaith dialogue, has received a number of awards for his interfaith work.



**August 2015 meeting of Hindu-Catholic Dialogue at Scarboro Missions.
Theme: Responding to the contemporary notion of "Spiritual but not Religious"**



Hindu – Catholic Dialogue of Canada

Expression of Support in Canada's Role in Welcoming Refugees

"Be one for whom the guest is God." –Taittiriya Upanishad

"Just as you have done to the least of these, you have done to me." –The Gospel of Matthew

Hospitality is among the most sacred values in many religious traditions, including Hinduism and Christianity. Today, conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and many other parts of the world have created a significant refugee crisis, whose impact is felt in Western Asia, Europe and North America. In light of this crisis, we—the Hindu-Catholic Dialogue of Canada—feel called to reaffirm the importance of hospitality in receiving the stranger and welcoming the refugee.

Canada is widely recognized as one of the most multicultural countries in the world. The Catholic and Hindu communities value this diversity and wish to maintain harmonious relations. For these reasons, and in response to the call for interreligious dialogue articulated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, in concert with the Hindu Federation of Canada and other members of the Hindu community, established a national Hindu-Catholic Dialogue. We have been meeting regularly since 2011.

Along with other leaders in inter-religious dialogue, we believe we have reached a fork in the road in our collective journeys as individuals, societies, and nations where it is no longer sufficient simply to tolerate one another, but to share in a deep, mutual understanding of one another's traditions, devotions and spiritual insights. To us, dialogue is not merely an exchange of pleasantries or glossing over our very real differences; it is an opportunity for encounter, for the deepening of relationships and for hospitality. We, once strangers, have become friends. Though this may entail some risk and vulnerability as we learn to open ourselves to one another, we believe that our shared objective of seeking understanding and enrichment through dialogue is the best means to promote harmony and solidarity between our respective communities and in the wider society.

Over the past five years of conversation, we have shared dialogue sessions on growing up Hindu or Christian in contemporary Canada, on the rising phenomenon of the religious "nones", and on our shared concerns for the transmission of our respective traditions to the next generation. Equally, we share traditions of empathy and compassion for the disenfranchised among us – traditions which run deep in our histories – and we extend a welcoming hand to those fleeing conflicts in their homelands.

"Be one for whom the guest is God." Echoing these words of the *Taittiriya Upanishads*, the members of the Hindu-Catholic Dialogue of Canada call on ourselves and all Canadians to offer our prayers to those reeling in response to war, terror, and hate. We urge all Canadians to respond with openness, care and generosity to those refugees who find their ways to our shores, and indeed to all strangers in our midst. Dialogue and encounter are among our most important resources for meeting the demands of the present refugee crisis.

February 2016

“The great Hindu teacher Adi Sankaracarya evoked a sense of mystery to describe the relation between the world and God, describing it as tattva-anyatvabhyam anirvacaniya – “indescribable as either the same or different.” I believe this same mystery of relationship characterizes the Hindu-Catholic dialogue. When we meet in dialogue, we encounter one another as neither the same, nor completely different, but bound together in a divine mystery.”

Dr. Reid Locklin

Associate Professor of Christianity and the Intellectual Tradition, University of Toronto



February 2016 meeting of Hindu-Catholic Dialogue at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir (Hindu temple). Theme: Hindu and Christian theologies of “Incarnation”. This meeting also discussed a public statement of support for refugees that was published in 2016 by the Hindu-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada. See text of this statement on previous page.

There are lots of Hindu-Christian initiatives taking place around the world....



A Hindu priest gives a shawl to the Pope during an interfaith meeting in Sri Lanka (PA)