

# Introducing *Auckland Inter-Faith Council*

By *Ruth Cleaver*

With over 220 recorded ethnic groups, Auckland is one of the world's most culturally diverse cities. Every neighbourhood has people of many faiths living side by side. To enhance social cohesion and help prevent misunderstandings or prejudice, it is important for people to be able to learn about religious beliefs and practices, and dialogue with those from other faiths.

*Auckland Inter-Faith Council (AIFC)* was formed to provide a platform for inter-religious dialogue and networking, and to create a model showing co-operation among religions.

*AIFC* is a voluntary, non-profit association of people from diverse religious traditions and faiths.

Established in 2003, it is run by a Committee of 11 volunteers from various faith traditions who meet regularly. Wherever possible Committee members are acting on behalf of and supported by their respective faith's leadership and community.

The Committee organises various types of events for the public, including lectures, seminars, and musical programmes. Events are held at different community and faith venues throughout the greater Auckland region.

*AIFC* also organises an annual programme for Year 12 students from various schools (religious and state) preparing for their final year at school. Held at the marae on the



UNITEC campus, the students are introduced to, and discuss, Maori spirituality and world religions.

A new initiative, which AIFC intends to continue annually, is the **Exploring Sacred Spaces** programme. In November, 2017 several hundred people participated in one or more visits to seven different faith venues throughout the Auckland region. The participants expressed their appreciation for being able to see new places and learn something about the faiths practiced there in an informal and relaxed way. Each of the host venues ensured the guests were welcomed, received some basic

information as well as a tour of the facilities, answered any questions, and provided refreshments and an opportunity to mix and mingle. The programme in 2017 included visits to Muslim, Christian (Anglican and Catholic), Sikh, Buddhist, and Hindu places of worship.

### Up-coming Event

On 27 March, 2018, AIFC will host an evening with *Dr Maureen Sier*, the Director of *Interfaith Scotland*. *Dr Sier* was the keynote speaker at the **National Interfaith Forum** in New Zealand in 2009, and has extensive knowledge of interfaith initiatives throughout the UK and Europe. She will be speaking at the *Quality Hotel Parnell* (10-20 Gladstone Road, Parnell) at 7:30pm. The event is open to the public and is free of charge.



Dr Maureen Sier



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