

Group for Interreligious Dialogue and Coexistence: More than Twenty Years of Interreligious Meetings

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Following the inhuman attack in 1994 against the *Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina*, which saw 85 dead and 300 injured, the women belonging to the *Acción Católica* of the Our Lady of the Guard of Florida Parish, in the Buenos Aires community, decided to reach out to the Lamroth Hakol Synagogue, found in the same area, in order to show their support and solidarity. From that initial meeting with the women of the Jewish community, we started to reflect on how we could follow up the meeting and organised workshops to gather about one hundred people together. From these meetings came the idea of creating an interreligious group which began to meet that same year, and saw women from the Baptist, Catholic, Jewish, *Kolla* (indigenous people) and Presbyterian communities come together.

Other issues of '*Women's Voice*' have seen articles from Dialogue and Coexistence (D. and C), the name chosen for the group which came about as a grassroots group, with no institutional structure and which continues to work well today. It enjoys the recognition and support from the leaders of the aforementioned religious communities as well as from people and organisations out with them.

Its aim is to "contribute to a culture of peace by creating spaces for interreligious dialogue, with respect for individuality and differences while searching for similarities that unite us, starting from our shared faith in the Creator which brings us together".

The group is presently made up of about 30 women who meet once a month. During the meetings, doctrinal themes are chosen together and then analysed from the different points of view of the different beliefs; contemporary issues are presented, each religion brings its own perspective and activities are scheduled.

Throughout these years, the group, as a school of coexistence, has promoted the integration of its members, by increasing the mutual understanding and the responsibility of each member and of the group as a whole in the role of paying witness to the fact that it is possible (whilst there is 'conversion and conviction') to replace confrontation with a conversation resulting in mutual enrichment based on respect and honesty which equally creates deep bonds of friendship.

Overtime, the group has managed to make itself known among civil and political society and has gained a particular place at historic and cultural events organised by NGOs and the local authority.

Starting from its objectives, courses of action have been established as:

- be witnesses to the fact that the shared faith in God makes us brothers and sisters and this commits us to spreading this fraternity to all humanity
- encourage interreligious groups to become more informed in the context of culture and peace

- promote interreligious dialogue in the respective communities of the different beliefs
- cooperate and participate in interreligious activities organised by different communities
- participate in Public activities and those in civil society by proposing a return to respect and dialogue as a basis for social exchanges
- develop actions which promote social integration, bringing a solution to the community's problems and are contribute to the common good
- be active promoters of using dialogue as a means of conflict resolution

Amongst those actions that have been taken, we can mention:

- Open meetings focused primarily on values and coexistence
- In 2004, in order to celebrate 10 years since the establishment of the group, a special invitation was sent to different faiths and forces in society, for a meeting to share the group's aims and which allowed for a rise in awareness about the need to overcome prejudices and a more profound meeting, reverse the culture of confrontation and replace it with that of peace, respect and fraternity.
- Communications in newspapers and reports for the local radio and Capital city radio
- Participation in the celebration of 150 years of the Olivos neighbourhood, with an action in the Parish garden
- Conferences in the communities of different religions
- Participation in the Liturgy school of the San Isidro Diocese
- Testimony of D. and C., symbolized by planting olive trees in *Plaza de Olivos*
- Participation in Historic Days and other events organised by the Vte. López authority
- D. and C. received the Award for Solidarity presented by the *Rotary Club d'Olivos* and the NGO *Orden del Olivo*, in recognition for its contribution to reconciliation, mutual understanding and peace within the community
- **To celebrate its 20th anniversary**, the group, with the support of all its members and the collaboration of of the participants, edited the book '*Mucho más de 20 años de Encuentros Interreligiosos*' (Much more than 20 years of interreligious dialogue), the presentation of which was attended by many.

In a world where misery and 'shadows' appear to be gaining each day, interreligious dialogue adds to other 'lights' that keep hope alive. D. and C., is just a modest and small seed for peace in this 'scorched' earth, but if we can plant another, then perhaps another and after even more, this earth will become an orchard where we new generations can walk and sing together, with their own identity, a fraternal hymn of praise for the Creator.