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Media Centre



## Jewish-Catholic Friendship Dinner

09 June 2010

On Sunday 6 June, the Jewish Community Council of Victoria and the Catholic Diocese of Melbourne held their fourth annual dinner, this year hosted by the Catholic Diocese at the Cardinal Knox Centre in East Melbourne. As on such previous occasions, the atmosphere was warm, the crowd congenial and there was an unquestionable feeling of a relationship continuing to grow.

According to JCCV President John Searle, the success of the evening reflected the JCCV's commitment to interfaith and multifaith relationships in recent years.

"The JCCV has an ongoing program of meetings with all major faith groups and its Executive members and staff are members of a wide range of government and NGO committees. In addition, the JCCV has developed exhaustive guidelines for interfaith strategy which will be launched later this year by Mr James Merlino MP, Minister for Sport Recreation and Youth Affairs, assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs, and Mr George Lekakis, Chairperson of the Victorian Multicultural Commission. In brief, we have invested considerable resources in seeking to ensure that the Jewish community is seen as an integral part of multicultural Victoria, working together with other communities for the good of all Victorians", Searle said following the dinner.

In responding to the welcome from Rev. Dr. John Dupuche, Chair, Catholic Interfaith Committee, Searle made reference to two potentially sensitive issues, the mooted elevation of Pope Pius XII and the recent Gaza flotilla matter. In doing so, Searle prefaced his remarks with the following observation:

*"I think everyone here knows that Catholics and Jews have had a variable and at times problematic relationship over the centuries. Thankfully many efforts have been made by both sides in the past half-century to put this troubled history behind us. This dinner is but one example of those efforts.*

*I'm delighted to observe that these efforts are particularly evident in both Australia and Victoria at the organisational level and also at a grassroots level. Jews and Catholics serve on various government committees together and in organisations such as the Jewish Christian Muslim Association. Furthermore, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry has been engaged in formal theological 'conversations' with Catholic representatives for some time and, as a result of recent discussions, I look forward to similar such 'conversations commencing in Melbourne in the near future.*

*Certainly from the local Jewish point of view, we regard the Catholic community as our friends and I believe that this sentiment is sincerely reciprocated.*

*Of course, this does not mean that contentious issues do not arise from time to time. I think the difference is that when such an issue arises today, as friends there can be honest and open dialogue."*

Searle later noted that this relatively newfound ability to speak openly demonstrated the great value of interfaith and multifaith dialogue. "While I am not so naïve as to believe that our issues with other communities have now disappeared, the fact that honest discussion is possible is in itself a major step forward and provides a foundation to build on for even better relationships. I am very encouraged by the progress I have observed over the past few years."

For further information contact John Searle on 03 9272 5566