



Provincialate : 4A Chestnut Drive, Singapore 679330.

Tel: 67602461

website: www.chij-sisters.org



The Inter-Religious Organisation, Singapore (IRO) was founded in 1949.

Logo

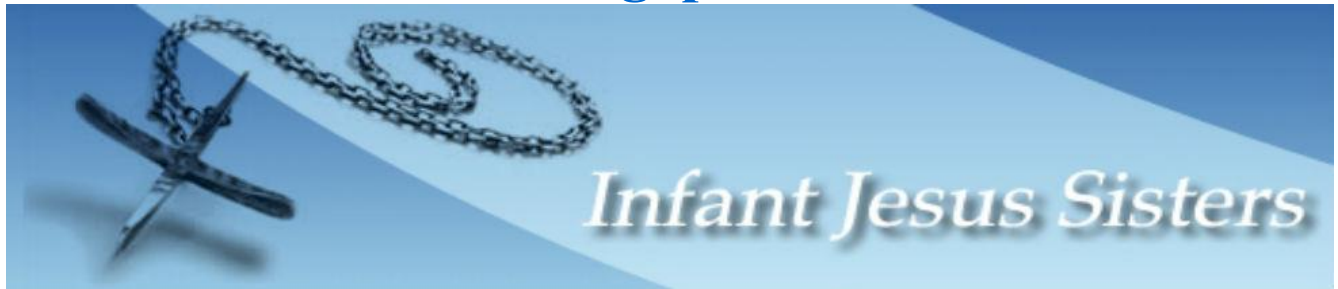
The IRO logo is a symbol of religious harmony and understanding in Singapore. Ten religions are represented in the [IRO](#), namely Hinduism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and the Baha'i Faith.

The idea for an interfaith organisation grew over the course of several meetings, and the Inter-Religious Organisation of Singapore and Johor Bahru was officially inaugurated at the Victoria Memorial Hall on 18 March 1949. The event, which included the organisation's first public lecture, was attended by more than 2,000 people. Representatives of the various religions in Singapore spoke on the role that religion plays in contributing to peace.

Organisational aims

The IRO aims to promote the spirit of friendship and cooperation among leaders and followers of different religions for the good of mankind. It also seeks to accord followers of different religions mutual respect, and provide them with assistance and protection so as to foster close cooperation within its membership for the common good of the community.

It originally represented six religions: Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. Over the years, it expanded to include Zoroastrianism, Taoism, the Bahá'í Faith and Jainism.



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The IRO is registered under the Societies Act, and is a non-governmental organisation with no legal powers or authority.

Functions of the IRO

Since its humble beginnings, IRO has worked quietly to promote peace and religious harmony in Singapore. The IRO has been involved in many local activities and events, and has played an important role in educating the Singapore public about different religions. It also organises public exhibitions and regularly offer prayers at public and national events.

This prayer is prayed at IRO meetings.

Invocation

O Lord, increase in us understanding and knowledge and set us free from the bondage of greed, hatred and ignorance, so that we may awake, arise and advance until the goal is reached, giving our bodies to work and our minds to the Lord.

May we work vigorously keeping within spiritual discipline to bring peace in our hearts. peace in our families, peace in our cities, peace in our planetary home, the world.

May we learn to master ourselves, sublimate our combative energies into creative channels, and freely offer ourselves in the service of our fellowmen, and our Lord.

Help us, O Lord, to ever strive to keep on these lines to promote peace on earth and goodwill among men.

By Thy grace, may we all prosper.



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IRO Women of Faith Wing (WOF)



At the Buddhist Temple



At an IRO function

The IRO Women of Faith Wing (WOF), which is made up of female members of different religions, meets monthly to deepen the understanding of the different faiths of the participants and to share different aspects of their lives according to their beliefs. The core members organise an annual event to celebrate International women's Day.

The WOF, headed by Sr Maria Lau, has also an ongoing array of fun and meaningful activities each month, including the *Walking the Path of our Culture and History* series where visits are organised to places of worship.

In addition, the WOF have organised forums and symposiums on these themes:

- Women and Prayer from the different faith perspectives.
- Drawing inspiration from Religious Saints or Religious Women from different faiths.
- Against all odds – how one's faith and belief in the goodness of people gives hope in times of suffering and difficulties in life.
- Using film followed by sharing interfaith stories as a means of reflection and dialogue.
- Sharing food that has meaning to different faiths during their religious festival celebrations.

Celebration of the International Day of Women 2024

On the afternoon of March 9th, at the Catholic Centre in Cana, the Maria Magdalena classroom on the third floor was filled with the sounds of laughter and joy. This was not just any gathering; it was a deliberate assembly of nearly 50 individuals from diverse racial and religious backgrounds—including Catholicism, Protestantism, the Bahá'í Faith, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikh, and Taoism—who came together to celebrate International Women's Day. The session, around the theme of "happiness," featured an engaging "laughter yoga" led by an expert demonstrator and was organised by the "Women of Faith" core group (WOF), part of the



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Singapore Inter-Religious Organisation. The event also welcomed several male participants, highlighting its inclusive nature.

Sr Maria Lau, Chairperson of WOF and a member of the Holy Infant Jesus Order, opened the event with a heartfelt welcome. She spoke about the unique genesis of WOF, recalling her realisation of the male-dominated leadership within the Singapore Inter-Religious Organisation and her subsequent determination to ensure women also had a significant voice. This led to the establishment of WOF in 2009, a group dedicated to fostering interfaith understanding and cooperation.

The core group of WOF which comprises women from different religious faiths meets regularly, not just to share their personal stories and backgrounds but to build a deeper understanding and mutual respect across religious divides. Sr Maria celebrated the progress they've made: "After years of dedication and through individual and community encounters, we've developed mutual respect and trust, allowing us to explore our differences and share our religious experiences openly. This open dialogue and the celebration of life enriches us all."

To further this mission of cross-cultural and religious understanding, WOF organises varied activities open to the public. This year, their initiatives included visits to significant religious sites like the Catholic Church of St. Alphonsus and the Ba'alwie Mosque, alongside other culturally enriching activities such as movie screenings, retreats, seminars and walking tours. These events serve as practical platforms for dialogue and learning, drawing diverse community members into meaningful conversations about faith.

Sr Maria underscored the approach taken during these interactions: participants share from their personal perspectives without trying to represent or convert others. She detailed the four levels of dialogue within WOF: sharing personal and communal life experiences, engaging in community service, participating in joint prayers, and discussing religious doctrines with insights from various faith leaders.

The day's event was both light-hearted and profoundly connecting; it included not only "laughter yoga" but also group discussions and a quiz competition with questions drawn from the inventions and contributions of men and women that was as educational as it was entertaining. Participants left with a deeper appreciation of each other's views and a sense of collective joy.

Mahnoor, a Muslim visitor from Pakistan, expressed her appreciation for such interfaith initiatives, noting, "Every religion is like a light illuminating life, and there should be no competition but only cooperation between them." She found the atmosphere of the event akin to a supportive learning circle, where everyone could contribute and grow.

Aidil, one of the few male attendees, reflected on the experience, "The group discussions were incredibly enriching. The chance to connect on such a personal yet universal level made this one of the most relaxed and enjoyable gatherings I've participated in."

This gathering was more than a celebration; it was a purposeful convergence that strengthened bonds, broadened understanding, and deepened respect across diverse religious and cultural lines.

(Written by Agnes Toh in Chinese for the Hai Seng Pao, a Chinese Catholic newspaper for a Catholic audience-Translated using Google Translate and edited by Sr Maria)



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Participants at the 2024 International Women's Day

Bridging Faiths: A Visit to Ba'alwi Mosque

Living in a diverse nation like Singapore, fostering harmony and peace amidst our cultural and religious differences is crucial. It was with this spirit in mind that I embarked on a visit to the historic Ba'alwi Mosque, organised by the Women of Faith (WOF) Committee of the Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO). This event, part of a series of visits to various places of worship, aimed to promote understanding and build bridges across religious divides.

As I entered the serene grounds of the mosque, a sense of tranquility washed over me. The air hummed with quiet contemplation, and the architecture exuded a sense of peace and simplicity. Our group, comprising individuals from diverse faiths, was warmly welcomed by Imam Habib Hassan, known for his gentle demeanour and dedication to interfaith dialogue.

Imam Syed Hassan al-Attas, or Habib Hassan as he is affectionately known, radiating warmth and wisdom, began by offering a brief introduction to Islam. He emphasised the core principles: peace, compassion and respect for all of God's creation. His words painted a picture of Islam that resonated deeply, dispelling any preconceived notions I might have held. He spoke of inclusivity, tolerance and the innate dignity of every person, values that transcended religious boundaries.

The highlight of the visit was undoubtedly the exploration of Imam's personal library. Floor-to-ceiling shelves housed a treasure trove of sacred texts: Qurans with intricate calligraphy written on sheep skin and mulberry leaves, Bibles that date back 500 years, and volumes from the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Even rarer manuscripts from lesser-known religions sat comfortably alongside these, testifying to Imam's openness to diverse spiritual paths.

"Knowledge is a gift from God," he explained, his eyes twinkling with passion. "To truly understand our own faith, we must strive to understand the beliefs of others. For in the sacred words of all religions, we find echoes of the same divine truth."

His words resonated deeply as we browsed through the collection, each book whispering stories of faith and human experience. The opportunity to touch these centuries-old pages, each containing profound wisdom, was a humbling experience. With each turn of the page, Imam highlighted the common threads woven into the fabric of every faith tradition.



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As the conversations flowed, a sense of community and shared humanity blossomed. The visitors, initially hesitant, voiced their appreciation for the opportunity to challenge their preconceptions and gain a deeper understanding of Islam. A participant, who initially felt apprehensive, shared her newfound perspective: "I used to think different religions were inherently divided. But today, I've learned they all share the same message of love, compassion, and the search for the divine."

Imam 's smile reflected his genuine joy. "That is the essence of true faith," he said. "It's not about division or superiority, but about finding the path that leads us closer to God and to one another."

Leaving the mosque, I carried with me a profound sense of gratitude. This interfaith encounter had shattered stereotypes and ignited a spark of curiosity and respect within me. The IRO-WOF's initiative served as a powerful reminder that bridging the divides between faith communities is not only possible but crucial in our society.

This visit wasn't just about exploring a place of worship; it was a journey into the heart of interfaith dialogue, a testament to the power of human connection and the shared yearning for peace and understanding that transcends religious boundaries. In an increasingly interconnected world, such initiatives offer a beacon of hope, reminding us that unity can bloom amidst our beautiful diversity.

Written by Ms Pauline Chan (IJ Associate)



Women of faith participants at the Ba'alwie Mosque with Imam Habib Hassan

The highlight WOF event in 2019 was the International Women's Day Celebration on 2nd March 2019, where *Stories of the Impact of Women in Religions* were shared by members of the Baha'i, Christian, Muslim and Taoist faiths. Over 50 men and women of different faiths attended and enjoyed the event that included a trivia quiz.

Infant Jesus Sisters, Singapore (founded in France, 1662, established in Singapore 1854)



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Women of Faith Core Group



Group Sharing at the Asian civilisations Museum

Read more about the happenings [on International Women's Day 2021](#) organised by the WOF CORE Group



Sr Maria and the Archbishop with the women of faith Committee



Women of Faith Core Group



Women of Faith group members with ex-President Halimah

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Archdiocesan Catholic Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue (ACCIRD)

This [ACCIRD](#) Council was set up to foster bonds of friendship, mutual understanding, respect and collaboration between Catholics and followers of other religious traditions through dialogue.



Some ACCIRD members with Mr Lawrence Wong



ACCIRD members with His Eminence William Cardinal Goh

The ACCIRD arm of the Catholic Church organises the annual Christmas party for the members of the Inter-Religious Organisation.



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What is Interreligious Dialogue?

Interreligious dialogue is a meeting of people of differing religions, in an atmosphere of freedom and openness, in order to listen to the other, to try to understand that person's religion, and hopefully to seek possibilities of collaboration. It is hoped that the other partner will reciprocate, because dialogue should be marked by a two-way and not a one-way movement. Reciprocity is in the nature of dialogue. There is give and take. Dialogue implies both receptivity and active communication.

Cardinal Francis Arinze, *Meeting Other Believers* (1997), 5.

The objective of the [Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference \(FABC\)](#) is to bring a Christian dimension to all communication activities and develop 'Social Communication' within the Asian Catholic community in order to support Christian living and the service of the Gospel.

[Interfaith Resources from Toronto ... read more](#)



Women of Faith members with his Eminence William Cardinal Goh at Christmas 2023

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ACCIRD hosted the Christmas party in Dec 2023 at St Joseph's Church (Victoria St)



ACCIRD hosted the Christmas party in Dec 2019 at St Joseph's Church (Bt Timah)

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At the Christmas celebration 2016 at the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd



At St Teresa's Church in Dec 2015