



Summary of President's Annual Report Given at the OMC Annual General Meeting, June 25, 2009

I am privileged to present my first year report as President and am thankful to the Board for putting confidence in my ability to lead this organization.

In the context of a restructured OMC I have seen need to broaden our role in a constantly changing environment of our justice and health care system. My task to fill some service gaps and operate within limited resources was facilitated by support and expertise of our staff and especially of our Manager, Patricia Williams.

I have attended meetings of four Regional Multifaith Committees and I am pleased to report their renewed enthusiasm and commitment to our Goals and Objectives. I was also able to address some of the outstanding concerns, relating to access to Spiritual and Religious needs of the inmates during my visits to the correctional facilities.

Our role to access for Chaplaincy services is now challenged by the growing population of non-Christian Faiths. OMC has to position itself for providing the necessary guidance and training to meet their Religious needs. This will require OMC to work more closely with the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. To extend our role to help integrate released offenders into society as meaningful citizens, we have started conversations with the Attorney General for a new and improved approach to reintegration.

OMC is looked upon as the most authoritative source of information on non-Christian Faiths by Businesses, educational Institutions and by all four levels of Government. OMC is held as the standard for recognizing a particular Faith by some, and is called as a resource to help mobilize the Faith communities.

We are also called upon to certify non-Christian Chaplains. Since we are not a certifying body, we have been able to provide informal assessment through our members, representing various Faiths.

OMC has been invited by the National Emergency Planning Committee of the Canadian Council of

Churches to help create awareness on the need for developing a plan by all Faith communities. With the threat of a possible second round of H1N1 Flu, we will be working with NAGEP to help maintain the health and safety of our Province.

Some of our achievements in the past year include:

- Our last Rites Committee has successfully resolved the issue for the Hindu community to dispose of cremated ashes into running streams
- Approval of a part-time Chaplain for newly opened Young Offenders facility in North West Ontario
- Negotiated training of Chaplains for crisis interventions with Greater Toronto Airport Authority;
- Conducted Board Management Training
- Undertaken a review of the Board membership criteria.

Future Plans we are exploring for the coming year include:

- To establish a roster of Chaplains of various Faiths to be available on-call on a fee-for-service basis for those who cannot have in-house Chaplains of several Faiths
- Training of our Chaplains in various Aboriginal Faith practices and way of life
- Community Chaplains role and availability;
- Access to ICU to perform last rites, in the absence of resident Chaplain
- Training of Funeral home staff on non-Christian Faiths requirements
- To complete the 5th revision of the Multifaith Information Manual
- Reaching out to other Faith communities for membership
- Work more closely with Federal Institutions for streamlining service deliveries as related to various Faiths
- To plan a Conference on the future needs of Chaplaincy services in the Province.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Board of Directors, Executives, head office staff, Regional Managers and Regional Multifaith Committees for their help, and I look forward to their support in the coming year.

Thank you!

Abdul Hai Patel, President

2009 Annual General Meeting of Ontario Multifaith Council on Spiritual & Religious Care

The 2009 Annual General Meeting was held on June 25 2009 at Forester Conference Center, 789 Don Mills Road. The meeting was called to order by President Abdul Hai Patel. Rev. Peter King gave a reflection sharing the beautiful words from the Gospel of Matthew 11.28-30. These lines invite us to revive our relationship with God, and to join in active service to humanity, through gentleness and humility, to foster unity among God's people and bring honor to Almighty.

One of the highlight of the event was a presentation of a plaque to the retiring treasurer Prakash Mody in recognition for many years of valuable Voluntary service as a Board member.



About fifteen years ago, Prakash Mody initiated the membership of the Jain religion and served in different capacity including two years as a Treasurer and retired recently from OMC and

several other social services organizations. Prakash characterized the OMC's motto of "One Purpose Many Faiths" and worked hard for the issues of the minority faiths. He received awards from province, local Jain organization as well as JAINA, the North American Jain parent body.

Guest of Honour and Keynote speaker at the meeting was Barbara Hall; Chief Commissioner of Ontario Human Rights Commission. Ms. Hall outlined the unique opportunity to talk about religion and human rights, and how it offered protection to various



faith groups. She particularly stressed the fact that interfaith dialogue as promoted and facilitated by

OMC is a key step for enhancing human rights for Faith communities. Touching on newer advances in the field she stated that despite the fact that OHRC is the oldest Commission in Canada, many rounds of changes to the code have been made, and major adaptations are still under way.

Ontario's Education Minister and MPP for Don Valley West, Kathleen Wynne, who spoke about government educational initiatives. She further elaborated the valuable contribution of OHRC to the school Boards in resolving issues involving religious rights. Rob Oliphant, MP for Don Valley West, a United Church Minister, also praised the role of Ontario Multifaith Council for providing important needs of spiritual and religious care in our Institutions. President Imam Abdul Hai Patel in his annual report presented review of the past years achievements and present challenges under economic crisis.

Dianne Algera proposed a vote of thanks to the speakers. Following that the meeting was adjourned.

Address of Barbara Hall, Chief Commissioner, Ontario Human Rights Commission

The speech by the Chief Commissioner Barbara Hall, focused on the new human rights system in Ontario, and how the Human Right Code protected people based on the ground of creed or religion.

Earlier the department dealt with the individual complaints. In contrast, the new system will allow them to get facts, raise awareness, bring people together and develop real plans for real change. The new mandate of the commission was to educate, empower, and mobilize to publicize leading edge human right policy. This can effectively promote resolutions in the areas of Family status, housing, and gender identity. These approaches can further resolve conflicts and provide a targeted action to clarify the law or enforce compliance to the code.

Ontario human rights Code states that every person has the right to be free from discrimination based on several grounds including religion. To have access to the same opportunities, benefits, dignity and respect regardless of their religion. This protection applies in the areas of employment, working conditions, promotions, buying and selling a house, and employment benefits. It is further extended into services including education, hospital care, correction facilities and government programs.

Whenever a rule conflicts with religious requirement, it is mandatory to make sure that people are able to observe their religion, unless it would cause special hardship due to cost or health and safety reasons. If the rules about wearing uniform, or protective head-covering conflict with religious dress requirement, there is a duty to accommodate to the point of undue hardship. This can often be easily modified in case of school uniforms

Ms. Hall went on to cite a specific case where religious rights of a 12 year old Khalsa Sikh student were infringed for wearing a ceremonial kirpan dagger that violated the “no weapons” policy of the school. The issue was settled through dialogue and accommodation through a decision of the Supreme Court of Canada. In contrast due to excessive risk of health and safety, the same Court did not make an exception to hard-hat requirement for a Sikh construction worker, whose faith required him to wear a turban. OHRC was granted leave to intervene at Superior Court of Ontario, in case of a woman testifying in a rape trial, when she was ordered to remove her Niqab by a judge in the Preliminary Inquiry.

Often conflicts arose in people's homes based on religion. A group of Orthodox Jews successfully fought for the right to erect “succahs”- a small temporary hut – on their balconies for the 9-day Succot festival. Similarly, OHRC had cases over the

way condo boards dealt with complaints of “funny” smoke coming from apartments, when in fact a new resident of Aboriginal background was conducting a sacred smudging ceremony.

OHRC also works with other Boards and Tribunals to help them apply the code in their decisions. For example OHRC was able to work with Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) to direct to its decision-makers, to respect human rights and religion in arriving at their decisions on claim before the Board. This was successfully done in case of a Hindu gentleman, who was offered work by his employer, that was in conflict with the religious code of handling food.

When religious rights come in conflict with other rights included in the code, one needs to be reminded that there is no hierarchy of rights. All rights under the code are equal, but no right is absolute. When the rights collide, one needs to look at both sides of the issue, and it is important take steps to balance these rights. Ultimately, issues of conflicting rights will be solved best through cooperation and conversation – not legislation. Respecting each other, recognizing and celebrating differences and finding common ground are the effective routes to community building.

The issues around religion, changes with the changing make-up of our social fabric. OHRC will continue to update their policy on creed, as new issues emerge, to make sure ot have a framework for looking at religious issues. Advancing human rights needs a process of respectful and thoughtful dialogue. She concluded the presentation with the words, “That's the kind of dialogue I see all around me tonight. I encourage you to continue the dialogue, and to serve as human rights advocates in your work place, in your places of worship, and in your homes. You are the expert on Creed, and the OHRC welcomes this expertise in an area that is changing so quickly”.

LANGUAGE OF THE SIKH SCRIPTURE

By Harsharan Singh

The hymns in Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture, are composed in different dialects of the Punjabi language. Arabic and Sanskrit words are also used in the scripture. The reason for that is that Guru Granth Sahib not only carries the compositions of the Sikh gurus, it also includes the writings of many Hindu and Muslim saints who brought the literary flavour from their respective linguistic backgrounds. Most of these saints lived before the time of Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of the Sikh faith. It is perhaps the only scripture in the world which incorporates and sanctifies the writings of people who did not subscribe to the faith. In that sense, it is the only nondenominational scripture that exists.

Guru Nanak carried his mission by using the commonly spoken language of Punjab. He composed his sermons in verse, set them to music and sang to the masses. His teachings fired the imagination of the peasantry of the Punjab as people could appreciate the divine message given in the language that they could understand.

Up until the time of Guru Nanak, the writing tool for the Punjabi language was not well defined. Verses in the scripture were recorded in a rather rudimentary fashion in the form of loose manuscripts, and saved from generation to generation.

It was Guru Angad (1539-52), the second Guru, who took upon himself the task of refining and modifying the Devnagri script of Sanskrit and developed the Punjabi letters. Thirty five letters with distinct sounds were established, coinciding with the fifty two sounds of the previous script.

The shapes of the thirty five letters were modified to create fluency in penmanship. Since, the set of thirty five letters were uttered by the Guru, the new script was called GURMUKHI- spoken by the Guru.

Guru Angad promoted the formal teaching of the Punjabi language using only Gurmukhi script. After recording and classifying the earlier religious manuscripts of Guru Nanak's and others, he recommended the use of Gurmukhi script for any future writings as well.

Fearing the loss of loose-leaf manuscripts, Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, completed the task of putting all the various scriptures in one huge volume called the Adi Granth. The writings of the Gurus and other saints were all classified into various ragas. The Granth contained over 6000 hymns.

Adi Granth was given the status of the eternal Guru by the tenth and last living Guru, Guru Gobind Singh and, henceforth, called GURU GRANTH SAHIB. In the present form, it is a volume of 1430 pages. The language is largely that used by the teachers of religions all over India at that time. It is strongly flavoured with the Punjabi of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The hymns are arranged according to ragas or classical Indian music, as they are meant to be sung.

Despite the sanctity given to the Guru Granth Sahib, it is not meant to be treated like an idol in a Hindu temple or the figure of Christ or Virgin Mary in a Catholic church. It is the source and not the object of prayer. The Sikhs revere it because it contains the writings of their Gurus and other saints they hold in esteem.

OMC AT A GLANCE

The Ontario Multifaith Council:

- consults and advises the government of Ontario on faith group matters relating to the provision of spiritual and religious care in government run or funded institutions
- ensures the availability of persons (Board members/appointees and volunteers) with adequate understanding, ability, qualifications and appropriate status within their faith group
- collaborates with the Government in providing multifaith awareness training and education to persons who work or volunteer in government institutions and transfer payment agencies

Please email us with your suggestions and content submissions. If you would like to write something for the newsletter, please let us know.

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