Opening Celebration of new Multi Faith Facility at Swinburne
By Tanya Carson

Demonstrating Swinburne University’s commitment to social inclusion and spiritual diversity on campus, the opening of the new Multi Faith Facility at the university’s Hawthorn campus was celebrated on Tuesday 3 May 2011.

The Most Reverend Dr Philip Freier delivered an address to guests including the Consul General of the Sultanate of Oman, representatives of the Malaysian High Commission, the Mayor of the City of Boroondara, members of the Council of Christians and Jew, Council for Chaplains in Tertiary Education and Boroondara Interfaith Network and senior executive members of Swinburne. Leaders from local places of worship, as well as Swinburne staff and students made up the group of over 90 people.

Following an introduction by the Director Student Services, Mr Andrew McFarland, the Archbishop delivered his address on interfaith dialogue.

"Part of the good fortune we enjoy in freedom of religion [in Australia] is maintaining respect for those of other faiths".

He spoke of seeking to foster "primacy of conscience and the freedom of each person to make choice in matters of religion".

"Undoubtedly as adherents within a religious system or tradition we will be unhappy when our members choose to identify elsewhere and believe differently, but we need to concede this freedom if we are truly to respect the integrity of a person’s belief."

"Religions today can - and must - affirm the distinction between holding to their own particular beliefs and respecting the human rights of those who do not share them".

The Archbishop also reminded the audience that "God is not only one but also just." Therefore for religious believers to affirm peace, they must work together for justice. "Justice will come not through the force of violence but through the reconciliation of non-violence".

He affirmed the hopes of the Multi Faith Facility at Swinburne to prosper “tolerance, understanding and the nurturing of faith for all who come to think, to meditate, to pray and to worship”. He also added that he hoped the facility would play a significant role in promoting interfaith dialogue for students at the university, and through them, "fostering tolerance, harmony and respect for people of all faiths throughout the community”.

The Swinburne Chaplain, Reverend Newton Daddow, facilitated an opportunity for staff and students from Jewish, Christian, Greek Orthodox, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu, and other belief frameworks to make symbolic offerings. One staff member quoted Kahlil Gibran “Your daily life is your temple and your religion. When you enter into it take with you your all”. The Manager of the Bookshop also made an offering of wisdom and knowledge in the form of a prayer tree and a collection of spiritually inspired books and a self composed prayer entitled “George’s Place".
There was an overwhelming sense of occasion at this event affirming the commitment to respect and diversity at Swinburne, not only around religion, but also politics, culture and different individual beliefs and values.

The Facility can be used as a place for multi faith activities. It offers access to chaplains, space for quiet prayer and meditation, and four rooms that can be booked for faith based activities. Read more about the Multi Faith Facility at http://www.swinburne.edu.au/stuserv/multifaith/