

XVII Global Connections Seminar in India Seminar Declaration

Daly College hosted the XVII Global Connections seminar in Mumbai and Indore, India in January 2016. Forty six delegates from 15 countries representing 28 schools participated in this seminar. The main theme of the seminar was Peace Education Within Faith Diversity. Delegates spent seven days developing their understandings and insights. Visits were made to a diverse range of schools, places of worship, and historical sites.

A series of lectures on the theme were given by speakers who have spent their lives working in very different contexts to find ways in which peace within religious diversity can be achieved. Mrs. Jaya Row, the founder of Vedanta Vision, spoke to the group about the importance for each individual of finding peace within themselves. Mr. Shivinder Mohan Singh, a successful entrepreneur turned social worker, called our attention to what he saw as a paradox in that presently “people are being used and things are being loved”. He asked us to remember that our responsibility is to “educate children to be happy, not to be rich”. He additionally advised us that happiness is dependent on our ability to develop meaningful relationships across our differences. Lt. General Syed Ata Hasnain, former army commander in Kashmir, spoke about the role of the military in promoting peace not war, and the power of outreach against the power of the gun. Dr. Sumer Bahadur Singh, Head of Daly College, gave a historic overview of Indian culture and its education system, emphasizing the importance of a liberal education in developing a peaceful and prosperous society. In order to gain a deeper understanding about the topics and issues presented, delegates reflected on ways in which these topics are pertinent to their own contexts.

Very quickly, delegates found that the diversity of cultures, schools, and ideologies that each brought could be shared through dialogue. Even though each individual had different perspectives, the power of active listening, respectful articulation, and deep reflection allowed for an understanding of the differences and similarities among the group. This leads to the conclusion that a powerful way of approaching peace education within diversity of faith, cultures or beliefs can be through deep conversations. These conversations can then develop into strong connections leading to positive relationships.

In relation to the theme of the conference, major religions have at their core a common belief, a benevolent God, and the values that the religions espouse have far more in common than in difference. It was a very powerful experience to come to a country that has the longest traditions of organized religion, deeply embedded into all aspects of society, but to witness a secular education system in operation. This allows schools to be centers where different religions are present, and the conversations about similarities and differences can take place, giving rise to tolerance and respect. The role of education therefore becomes central to developing peace within religious settings. In short, as a plaque at Daly College states: “Education sets you free”.

The experience reminded us, as school leaders, that there is no substitute for face-to-face conversation to develop understanding and respectful relationships. In a modern, technology driven world, it is an appropriate time to be mindful about the need to ensure that our students are taught the art and joy of being involved in an enlightened exchange.

We believe schools have an important role to teach students how to live in peaceful harmony with themselves, others, and their surroundings. In terms of the seminar’s theme,

we encourage schools to explore ways to facilitate dialogue between the faiths in order to promote understanding. We see the acquisition of deep understanding of diverse faiths as being fundamental to achieving peace across religions. Our experience of schools in India has shown us that this respectful dialogue between faiths is clearly possible.