

Victoria Compassion

Sheila Flood is a member of the multifaith Advisory Board for the Compassion Project in Victoria. The initial project will soon begin study groups based on Karen Armstrong's [Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life](#).

In mid-May, on Mother's Day in fact, a good turnout of about 40 people of several different faiths gathered at the synagogue on Blanshard Street for the last session on a series of conversations held "world café" style on the theme of compassion. We'd begun growing pretty healthy bonds in just those four sessions, talking about things far beyond normal chitchat over coffee. No one wanted the conversations to end here.

We all had our own motives I think, to be drawn away from gardens and patios and beaches on one of the most beautiful days of the year. There was a thirst to share with each other, which could be considered a little bizarre, since all four faiths in the room – Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Bahá'í – are in conflict with each other somewhere in the world. I wondered to myself, since we all need reasons, what need on Maslow's pyramid could possibly explain the pilgrimage this group consistently made to each other's doorsteps?

Maybe it's an existential need to connect, or find meaning? That need seems typically strongest at the beginning of adulthood, but looking around at my peers, I think it's just as rampant at the end of the busiest years of our lives, when we finally have time to raise our heads and look around a bit. So many people begin to search and to again be open to spiritual teachings once shoved aside.

Most of us, too, probably share the opinion that the calamities caused by ego, power and money have nothing to do with the teachings of our respective religions, and everything to do with people talented enough to persuade the multitudes of their private agendas.

Our conversations have centred on Karen Armstrong's "[Charter of Compassion](#)", a short one-page document distilled from input by a multitude of people of every background from all over the world. It's truly a collective work, and it has a great punch line: *"Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community."* According to Armstrong, there is a great and urgent need for these shared values to be at the centre of our lives and our communities, locally and internationally.

At the end of the final session, the feedback was to please continue. Expand. Make this available to people of every faith and no faith. Armstrong's latest book, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, with chapters dedicated to *Empathy, Mindfulness, Action, and How Should We Speak to One Another?*, offers a great opportunity to open up our first tentative project to all Victoria. If you'd like information on joining a study group of diverse people, possibly in your own neighbourhood, email victoria.compassion@gmail.com