

**Religious women put faith in unity  
(Graeme Leech)**

WOMEN from nine different faiths have united to offer an alternative way to tackle division and hatred in society.

A chance remark at a 1999 conference of Catholic bishops turned into reality with yesterday's launch of the Women's Interfaith Network.

Initiator Josie Lacey, a member of the Jewish faith who responded to an idea from a Muslim delegate, thinks the network is essential for the sake of society's future.

"The world is in turmoil. Wars are being fought in the name of God and religion," she said.

"I believe women have the ability to communicate and to show that religion can unite us. Women are not afraid to communicate, but society as a whole must learn to talk."

Representatives from Aboriginal, Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Zoroastrian and Quaker communities gathered at NSW Parliament House to outline their purpose, pray and read from scriptures.

The readings reached across all boundaries, spoke of the essential equality between men and women, of love and compassion, unity and diversity and Aboriginal spirituality. Mary Cresp, a Catholic nun, said the group hoped to encourage other groups to form around the country and create a network

"I think it's the only way to overcome divisions and social destruction in our community," she said.

"Our challenge is for members to be confident in their own faiths, and rejoice and celebrate our difference."

Ms Lacey said: "No one is trying to upstage anyone and no one is trying to convert anyone.

"Maybe we'll be role models for men."

Chris Roberts, a Tibetan Buddhist, said: "If the good heart that has been generated is kept going, we'll have a very good future and it will benefit others."