

The Religious Diversity Centre in Aotearoa New Zealand

Religious Leaders Forum November 28th 2024

St Johns Theological College, Auckland

a brief Report

Attendees :

Suzanne Mahon / Paddy Payne - Baha'i National Assembly
Rev Peter Norman - Methodist Churches in NZ
Rev Stuart Vogel - Chinese Christian Churches
Talib Al Bayati - Islamic Council
Rabbi Dean Shapiro - Beth Shalom Synagogue
Stephen Goodman - NZ Jewish Council
Rev Roxy Gahegan - Presbyterian Church (for The Moderator)
Rev Stuart Lange - NZ Christian Network

Rev Prince Devanandan - RDC / RLF Moderator
Prof Paul Morris - RDC Trustee / Presenter
Ricky Waters - RDC Trustee / co-Chair
Mary Nissen - RDC Administrator / note-taker
Tayyaba Khan - RDC Change Manager / note-taker
Prof Paul Blaschke - RDC Climate Action Group / Presenter
Richard Milne - RDC Climate Action Group / Presenter
Nizar Mohamed - RDC Climate Action Group / Presenter
Prof Peter Lineham - Presenter

Apologies :

Rev Rose Luxford - Moderator Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa NZ
Robert Hunt - Buddhist Council
Rabbi Rube - Auckland Hebrew Congregation
Mohammad Amir

Programme :

The Gathering began with a cuppa and catch-up from 9.45am
Mihi Whakatau conducted by Prince and everyone introduced themselves

Session one – Religious Literacy Religious Competency Survey. What every Kiwi must know. Prof Paul Morris (see presentation attached)

51% of NZ's population is a-religious. 49% of the population that is religious are also immigrants. We are religiously and culturally diverse and therefore there is a need for us to learn more about each other.

Wellington-based Focus groups have tested the Survey and it is almost at the go-live stage. It is a very important piece of work for the RDC to discover :

- People's level of knowledge regarding differing religious communities

- Their awareness and experience of those communities
- Their understanding of the role that religion plays in our society
- The impact of religion on people's lives; and
- How to interact with people of diverse religious background in a sensitive, appropriate and inclusive way

Religious literacy is the ability to recognise and critically reflect on the intersection of religion and the social, political, and cultural aspects. This includes having knowledge of different dimensions of the diverse religious traditions and how they impact society.

Religious Competency is how Religious Literacy is appropriately applied, or 'acted out' in diverse religious and inter religious interactions.

RLF attendees were each given a copy of the Survey to complete in 20 minutes. These were then 'marked' and many were surprised at the gaps in their own knowledge.

Paul encouraged attendees to make this Survey available to their own communities. He also offered to provide a Survey summary for a specific group if this was desired - contact Paul at research@rdc.org.nz

Session two - RDC Climate Action Group (CAG) : Paul Blaschke, Richard Milne and Nizar Mohamed (attendees were directed to handouts in their Forum pack)

The CAG was mandated by the RLF in 2017 was, "the importance of recognising the climate crisis as an urgent issue for human beings which impacts the well-being of everyone on the planet." Attendees were directed to the Climate action page of the RDC Website :

<https://rdc.org.nz/rdc-climate-action-group/>

Aims of the RDC Climate Action Group: Education, Advocacy and Action.

Recognised consequences of warmer atmosphere:

- Sea level rise, coastal flooding
- Increased intensity and frequency of freak weather
- Floods, wildfires and drought
- Food and water insecurity
- Emigration and conflict
- Social injustice will increase

The importance of religion and science was discussed. We should look at more holistic approaches in scientific beliefs. We should use technical knowledge from science, but also apply our moral compass from religious communities.

Kotahitanga - We are part of nature. Kaitiakitanga (Stewardship) – An important aspect of these principles is justice. Religion can provide a moral basis in terms of justice in making a decision. We are exploiting resources and they are not distributed equally. Once again religion can provide the moral principle of equity to meet the basic needs of life. Terminology climate justice versus climate change – it address the climate despair we find ourselves in.

The RLF was asked five questions to discuss in small groups as to what might be the continuing mandate and how the CAG might better challenge and resource our religious communities (see attached 'Summary & Responses' document – which has been sent to the RDC CAG for action - two resources are currently being developed)

Session three - Report from Royal Commission Report on Abuse in Care (Implications for Religious Communities), Peter Lineham (see presentation attached)

The report largely deals with Christian churches, but talks to the regulation of all faith communities.

Focused on primarily those in institutional care. 1950 – 1999 was the inquiry period. This meant they could receive live evidence and a large team of people who could trace and validate what had been shared as part of the inquiry.

NZ inquiry was announced in 2019 by Labour. The Anglican and Catholic Bishops wrote to ask that the Churches be included. The cabinet reluctantly included them. The scope was broadened to other Christian groups. Structure of the reports were initially separated out based on groups of Churches. State referrals could mean people were passed into care of faith-based communities. No other faiths were reported as abusive but only a few of the other faiths were large enough in the timeframe that was in scope for the inquiry.

Orphanages, children's residences, faith-based schools, local churches, third party care providers, Gloriavale, foster care and family homes and unmarried mothers homes are the locations of faith-based abuse that were investigated.

Loss of regulation occurred when children were moved to foster care, as little precautions were taken as to who was fostering. Untrained people were given powerful authority. There was no obligation to report it to the Police until recently.

Framework looked at colonialism as a critical factor towards abuse – including patriarchy and how minorities are looked upon.

Religious bodies are hopeless to train their clergy and are inequipped to deal with children/rangatahi. Training in this aspect was not a priority and this would apply to most religious communities. It can be argued that Churches have still not got their act together. There are inconsistencies that continue to exist.

Proposed solutions:

- General recommendation addressed tightening of judicial system, and investigation unit
- Development of independent Care Safe Agency with mandatory role to accredit bodies taking care with effective oversight of all agencies
- Independent Puretumu Torowhānui agency for holistic redress including for faith-based bodies (maybe voluntary but could be enforced)
- Professional registration of all staff and agencies including vetting screening.
- Performance management of all clergy using independent supervision
- Proper selection of clergy, stand down of any facing charges, dismissal of convicted offenders
- Impartial & inconsistent evaluation of abuse allegations
- National register of complaints
- Campaign vs discriminatory beliefs
- Care System office/Agency to implement recommendations; Care Safe Agency to report to it.

Session four - 2023 NZ Census Overview. Prof Paul Morris

This will probably be the last census in NZ . The cost of such a venture being \$300 million. Instead, the replacement tool will be called " administrative data First Approach"

Those identifying as "No Religion" has increased from 2018 census 48.2% to 51.6%

- Those identifying as "Christian" has dropped significantly from 44% to 32.6%
- However Hindu has increased from 1.5% to 2.9%, Islam from 60,000 to 75,000 , Sikh followers have doubled , Buddhist has also increased. Judaism is stable
- Much of the above increases (especially Islam) are due to immigration
- NZ has a high % of those in the "No religion" category 51.5% vs Australia at only 25% and UK at 26%

The good news is that 40% of the population are religious. However, 67% of Maori are non religious (see attached 'NZ Census Religious Affiliation)

Session five - General Discussion around the RDC and how we may better support the Religious Communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Ricky Waters

Funding for the RDC has been a challenge. The word "Religion" in our title is excluding us from consideration in all recent applications. Serious consideration is needed as to whether we change our name to address this issue.

The RDC has 5 strategic principles :

1. Educational and interventional
2. Engagement / dialogue projects
3. Social Justice
4. Religious Diversity capacity building
5. Research/leadership

The Religious leaders were asked " How can the RDC engage the Religious Leaders better and expand our network ?"

As it had been a long day the RDC was asked to distribute a questionnaire, post Forum, to both those who had attended, and those invited but unable to attend.

Report compiled by Tayyaba Khan, Mary Nissen, Ricky Waters



Attachments (included as part of the Report)

Religious Literacy, Religious Competency. What every Kiwi must know - slides

RLF 2024 Climate AG Responses - document

New Zealand Census Religious Affiliation - slides

Churches and the Royal Commission on Abuse in Care - slides