

Newsletter of the Religious Diversity Centre in Aotearoa New Zealand

March 2026

In a world of increasing conflict, marginalisation, and 'othering' we continue to provide safe space for conversations, sharing our life stories, and listening to the hurts and the aspirations of those fellow humans with whom we chose to interact in our daily lives.

In a world of confusion, anger, disconnection, dis-interest, and dis-engagement we continue to find hope and purpose through our spiritual / religious communities, our faith and understanding of our own traditions, and within our deeper selves. Such hope and purpose we endeavour to share with one another. Thank you for joining with the RDC as we promote a diversity of perspectives and passions.

We are reliant upon each you to be involved, to be supportive, and to help us to have a voice as the RDC Trust has only 7 volunteer Trustees, and 2 part-time staff and. You can get to know them at :

<https://rdc.org.nz/current-trustees/>



Our **Religious Leaders Forum** back in November was small in number, but generous in conversation and commitment. We were treated to some wise words and challenges from Mervin Singham, CE of the Ministry for Ethnic Communities, and explored a number of issues around social in-equality and poverty. Wouldn't it be great if we could offer funding assistance to those who might wish to attend – many of our smaller religious communities have no funds for 'leaders' to travel.

The full Report on the RLF , including a copy of the submission to the Prime Minister can be accessed on our web site at : https://rdc.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/2025_RLF_Report.pdf

The dates for our 2026 **Yr 12 Leadership in Diversity Days** are confirmed for Auckland - Tuesday August 11th at Unitec Institute of Technology TNK Marae, Thursday August 13th at Manukau Institute of Technology NKW Marae. We are also keen to have one similar event in Wellington. If you know any teachers of Yr 12 students please encourage them to get in touch with us on admin@rdc.org.nz .



If you live in Auckland or Wellington and could offer a few hours volunteering at one of these events, that would greatly assist us. Also email us to tell us of your availability. We are grateful for funding provided for these events by the Astor Foundation.

MISSION STATEMENT: To promote understanding, appreciation and respect for religious diversity among the religious, spiritual and secular communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

STATEMENT AND PURPOSE:	TE TIRITI O WAITANGI	DISTINCTIVE VISION & VALUES
<p>The Religious Diversity Centre of Aotearoa New Zealand (RDC) is a national taonga responsible for promoting understanding and appreciation of religious diversity, and the significant role religious and spiritual communities play in Aotearoa New Zealand. RDC aims to provide an independent platform for informed conversations on religious and spiritual issues in the public sphere.</p>	<p>RDC is committed to upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi and to embodying its principles. We share the view that all humans have a sacred responsibility to care for the Earth, its people, and all living beings.</p>	<p>Collective responsibility – a culture of collective responsibility had to established, one person taking the lead was untenable and not sustainable A common understanding about RDC and the direction that it was taking Attention on the internal workings of the organisation Learning from the past to inform the future</p>

As the RDC has now been operational for just over 10 years, we have decided we need a **Review and Reset Hui** where we can gather leaders of religious communities, current and potential funders, government departments and other stakeholders for a day together. We are aiming for June / July and will probably meet in Wellington. If this interests you, or if you know someone / an organisation who would like to be included please contact the RDC Executive Director, Ricky Waters, directly on treasurer@rdc.org.nz

One of our on-going challenges is fundraising for our general and administrative costs. We currently have only three people who make regular monthly **donations** – to whom we are very grateful. Perhaps you would like to join these three in helping to ensure that we have the funds to continue beyond the end of 2026.



Please let us know by emailing treasurer@rdc.org.nz. Perhaps a regular monthly gift is not something you are able to do, but an annual donation, or a one-off donation might work for you (we have some 25 such individuals and organisations who support us in this way, and for whom we are equally grateful). As the RDC is a registered Charity any donation over \$5 qualifies for a tax rebate - tax receipts are issued annually in April. You can also ask the IRD to send your charitable donations tax rebate directly to charities as a donation. If you wish to include to RDC in such a donation please clearly print 'The Religious Diversity Centre in Aotearoa New Zealand Trust' as the name of the charity – and our registration number is CC52791. Please let us know you have made this arrangement so we can look out for this in our bank account. (KiwiBank 38 – 9017 – 0433364 – 00)



Following the positive feedback on the **Thinkpiece** in the last Newsletter by RDC Co-Chair Anthony Green, I have attached a further piece of writing from Tony in which he speaks about 'The Christchurch Invitation' which was developed following the March 15th 2019 mosques attack and its ongoing communication through regular podcasts. Here are a few sentences to whet your appetite ...

At RDC we have talked about the importance of creating safe spaces in which to have challenging conversations. Though perhaps we should speak, not of “safe”, but of “brave spaces”; spaces in which to explore how best to live together.

For in a time of violence and destruction, and a world filled with anxiety and uncertainty, challenging conversations need some bravery to be open to an element of discomfort to our established ideas.

A secular, materialistic world often struggles to see faith and tradition as anything other than a private matter or even a source of division but at RDC, we come together from different faith traditions. What then can faith contribute?

What can we do when even “leaders” seem wary of causing offence to so-called friends? It seems crucial to make our personal values clear; not to attempt to speak for others – that should never be – but at least to

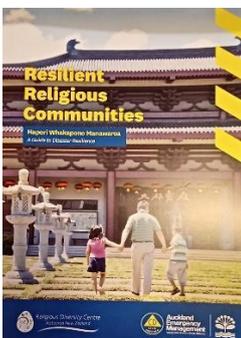
try to make clear who we are, as individuals. And to listen to others and their stories of who they are. That won't always make for comfort. ...



We have now had national and regional launches of our Climate Action Guide - **E tū te mana o te ao: Building a Climate of Hope: Faith and Action Guide** and are looking at a re-print of further copies which can be distributed. This small book can be read on-line (and downloaded) at : <https://rdc.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-12-Climate-Faith-and-Action-Guide.pdf>

Please see an **attached article** on this provided by Mary Eastham of the RDC Climate Action Group. Again, here is a piece to pique your interest ... *This first interfaith climate action book has been enthusiastically and joyfully received. It fills a niche in climate change literature by describing the significant role people of faith can play in creating the collective will to make care of the environment front and centre in policy discussions and decision making. People of faith are committed citizens who think about climate change in moral terms, not just as a scientific, economic and technical issue. We believe that care of the environment is integrally connected with everything that effects the wellbeing of people, like housing, employment and food security. People of faith care about how damage to the earth's eco-systems effect not only those living day but also the next generation. ...*

In March we have two further **Religious Diversity / Anti-discrimination Workshops** in Palmerston North and Wellington. If you would like us to provide one of these for your community, or for staff PD, or just for general interest, check out the details at : <https://rdc.org.nz/community-diversity-workshops/> and then contact us at admin@rdc.ac.nz so we can begin a conversation on tailoring a Workshop especially for you / your group.



In the coming months we hope to have some **Disaster Resilience Workshops** which bring together local / regional councils and religious communities to develop useful work plans in anticipation of such disasters. There was a great booklet produced by the Auckland Council and RDC after a number of Workshop events. You can check out further details at : <https://rdc.org.nz/resilient-religious-communities-2/> and request some hard copies of the booklet by emailing admin@rdc.org.nz

We will also be re-launching the religious survey, now refined and being offered as **'The Aotearoa New Zealand Interreligious Literacy & Competency Survey'**. This will eventually be available through the RDC web site. If you would like to be able to conduct this Survey with your own religious / community groups (and get some feedback) please request this through admin@rdc.org.nz

Listening across cultures and beliefs: the “Christchurch Invitation” podcast

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For in a time of violence and destruction, and a world filled with anxiety and uncertainty, challenging conversations need some bravery to be open to an element of discomfort to our established ideas.

A secular, materialistic world often struggles to see faith and tradition as anything other than a private matter or even a source of division but at RDC, we come together from different faith traditions. What then can faith contribute?

In the weeks after the 2019 Christchurch mosque attacks hundreds visited Masjid An-Nur. I remember a young lady from Idaho, USA, entering in tears. She was followed by a lady from Melbourne, also in tears. They hugged one another. The American said, “My friends think I’m weird because I don’t watch the news. It’s bleak and dark and I feel powerless to do anything.”

We spoke. This was no time to proselytise to a belief but some lines came up – Wordsworth’s pointing to “the little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love.” Words that are echoed in an Islamic teaching that “the best deed is the one done regularly, no matter how small.”

And now, and for some time, with the onslaughts in what the western world has called “the Middle East,” powerlessness and impotence have come again with awful force in the face of an indifference to human life. Bombings and destruction treat lands as a new kind of terra nullius, as if the human and natural life in them is of no consequence.

What can we do when even “leaders” seem wary of causing offence to so-called friends? It seems crucial to make our personal values clear; not to attempt to speak for others – that should never be – but at least to try to make clear who we are, as individuals. And to listen to others and their stories of who they are. That won’t always make for comfort.

When Farid Ahmed, speaking for his wife Husna and for himself and their daughter, Shifa, said that he forgave the killer it was not a stance that pleased everyone. In the time when I was asked to serve as the media spokesperson for the mosque I had a caller from the Muslim community say, “Brother. You have got to stop him from talking.” I said, often, that “you can agree with Brother Farid or you can disagree, but you cannot say you don’t know what he stands for.”

After those 2019 attacks – now seven years ago (goodness me, doesn’t time surge on?) – a small group of us in Christchurch sat together to ask where do we go from here? We’d recognised faith as a source of strength for those who’d suffered loss and we’d felt the wrap-around of compassion from the wider communities when they’d seen past labels.

It seemed like an invitation, even an imperative, to try to work for something better. We called it the Christchurch Invitation. It still moves along, quietly.

Out of that work, part of my own small effort in these spaces of listening is a fortnightly podcast series called “Christchurch Invitation.” It’s on Spotify and on Apple Podcasts (www.podfollow.com/christchurch-invitation).

It does not preach a particular faith yet its purpose can be felt in a Qur’anic verse often cited in 2019: that our Creator could have made us with the same language and identity but, as the Qur’an tells us, our difference is: “so that you might know one another.” (Qur’an 49:13).

The task then: to know who is our neighbour? To ask: who is the stranger to us in the places where we live? And to ask: to what does the stranger hold dear? What’s precious to them?

The aim is for inclusive conversations across lines of community, and faith (and non-faith), ethnicity, and more. Conversations about belonging and what that means, and to ask where people draw their strength and their sense of identity. How do we live together if we do not know one another? Faith and tradition can be powerful, sustaining forces in this space.

Those conversations have included a young Māori man working through problems and coming to realise the gift of his upbringing with whanau and aroha and more. A Pakeha engineer whose quiet sense of

Christianity gave him acceptance of his physical disability. A New Zealand composer with a Greek migrant whakapapa spoke of his commission for an NZSO concert that created a third space in which to come together. A police social worker with a Sāmoan whakapapa talked of his work for sports that make a space for the intellectually disabled. And a number of different speakers talked of their acceptance of the loss of someone dear to them.

By way of example of the ways in which we can hear one another, “Memorial” is a verbatim drama co-created by two young, former Juilliard students – Arianna Gayle Stucki and Adam El-Sayigh. It’s constructed using the words of people who experienced loss and grief and it came out of Arianna’s visit to Christchurch in June and July 2019. She didn’t come looking for a story; rather, she came wanting to listen to people who had suffered hurt and loss and who wanted to talk. In Episode 30 and 31 of my podcast I speak, via zoom, with Arianna and Adam on the process of listening.

In a 1993 PBS interview about her work, and talking about racism, the late Toni Morrison put a shape on the issue: “if you can only be tall because somebody’s on their knees, then you have a serious problem.”¹ When problems are serious, the mahi of finding ways to hear one another becomes an urgent business.

There is much to do. The late Rabbi, Lord Jonathan Sacks, wrote of “the dignity of difference.” To me, a faith can ground us in a way that allows us to know ourselves and be comfortable with that dignity. It begins with listening.

*Anthony Green
March 2026*

¹ PBS Interview with Charlie Rose. The quote occurs in this video (an abbreviated version of the longer conversation): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2txzMkT5Pc>, Accessed 6 March 2026.

Article for RDC Newsletter from the Climate Action Group

RDC's most recent publication *E tū te mana o te ao: Building a Climate of Hope: Faith and Action Guide* has now been launched nationally in Auckland and Wellington in 2025, and regionally in Palmerston North, 1 February, and Auckland, 7 February, 2026. The first two regional launches were held during World Interfaith Harmony week, precious to climate change activists because it brings together committed people from all walks of life, every culture and faith community to make care of the environment central to their life's work. One further regional launch will take place in Christchurch on 19 March, very close to the Equinox Earth Day.

This first interfaith climate action book has been enthusiastically and joyfully received. It fills a niche in climate change literature by describing the significant role people of faith can play in creating the collective will to make care of the environment front and centre in policy discussions and decision making. People of faith are committed citizens who think about climate change in moral terms, not just as a scientific, economic and technical issue. We believe that care of the environment is integrally connected with everything that effects the wellbeing of people, like housing, employment and food security. People of faith care about how damage to the earth's eco-systems effect not only those living day but also the next generation.

Part one sketches how the 7 faith traditions in Aotearoa articulate the moral imperative to live in harmony with the earth and all living creatures. It documents major statements made by interfaith groups at international conferences and COPs on biodiversity, sustainable development and critiques of an economic system that prioritises profits over the wellbeing of people and the environment.

Part two outlines the triple A's of making a difference: Awareness which leads to Advocacy, which leads to Action and Activism. It presents the science of climate change science in very accessible language. It provides many practical things that people can do to mitigate further damage to the earth and oceans and build resilient communities.

It inspires. As people of faith work together in community, we discover the importance and joy of collective action in habitat restoration work to restore native biodiversity. Or the companionship and enthusiasm in taking political action to bring about climate justice for the most vulnerable people in society. Collective action engenders hope. A major thread woven throughout the faith and climate action guide is the importance of hope. Indeed the most hopeful people in society when it comes to climate disruption are precisely those actively engaged in climate action and climate justice. This is especially true of young people who might easily sink into despair because they see their future being taken away.

Below are photos from the Palmerston North and Auckland launches.

The online version of *E tū te mana o te ao: Building a Climate of Hope: Faith and Action Guide* can be accessed at <https://rdc.org.nz/rdc-climate-action-group/>. Our faith communities teach us to reach beyond ourselves, towards others, and to the world around us. They help us to cross boundaries and care for each other and for the environment. The Religious Diversity Centre's new publication *E tū te mana o te ao: Building a climate of hope: Faith and Action Guide* explores different faith communities' beliefs about our relationship with the natural world and provides inspiring examples about how we can all mitigate further damage to the earth and oceans and create communities of resilience.

Mary Eastham
RDC Climate Action Group
March 2026



Palmerston North Launch Event



Auckland Launch



Auckland launch

