

Newsletter of the Religious Diversity Centre in Aotearoa New Zealand

September 2026

Greetings to all our Friends and Supporters.

It is already October and this needs to get to you so you can be up to date on the activities of the RDC and to learn how you may be able to continue to engage with us. We have been busy.

The 'Season of Creation' in the Christian tradition has created a number of opportunities for our Climate Action Group, and our Yr 12 Leadership in Diversity Days attracted a record number of schools / students. October is our Annual Appeal month and we encourage you to consider making a donation to the RDC. The RDC launched at Parliament in 2016 and we are looking to host a Re-Set Hui which will involve a number of our stakeholders - we want to make sure we are scratching the right itches, speaking the right words, and engaging in the right places.

So grab a cuppa and read your way through this Newsletter – you will find a number of links to fuller Reports and further information on the RDC website and we encourage you to access these.

Ricky Waters, RDC Executive Director

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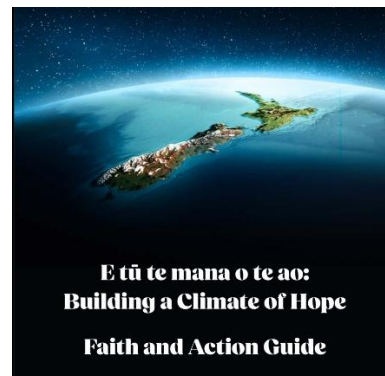
Building a Climate of Hope



With some external funding, we were able to get a further print-run of these books. They have now mostly been distributed to Libraries and to Parliamentarians.

The 'Season of Creation' in the Christian tradition has also given a number of opportunities to promote this resource.

If you would like us to come to your group to promote this resource book -



please contact us at : admin@rdc.org.nz A reminder that you can access / download this at : <https://rdc.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-12-Climate-Faith-and-Action-Guide.pdf>

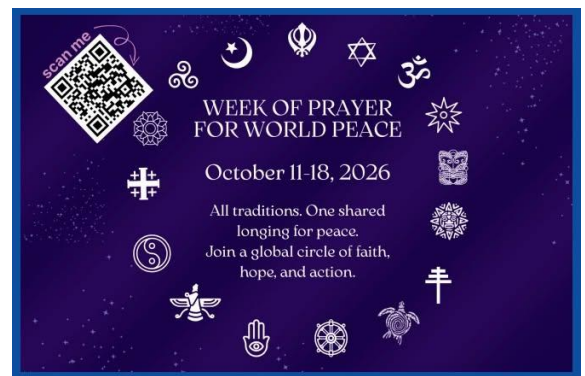
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The Inter-Faith Week of Prayer for World Peace 2026

This takes place across the world from **October 11 – 18**.

Daily prompts for prayer will appear on the WPWP Facebook page. Any public events that we know of will also be promoted on this page :

<https://www.facebook.com/WPWP NZ2014>



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Yr 12 Leadership Development Days



This year's events were held on **August 11th** at the Nga Kete Wananga Marae at Manukau Institute of Technology – with 115 students from 11 high schools and their teachers; and on **August 13th** at the Te Noho Kotahitanga Marae at Unitec Institute of Technology - with 62 students from 7 high schools and their teachers. Student speakers presented talks regarding their religious teachings on the Environment or on Social Cohesion (with specific topics given to them) from Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Baha'i, Muslim perspectives. You can read more about these events at : <https://rdc.org.nz/leadership-diversity-days/>

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RDC Financial Statements

Our Financial Statements to year end June 30th 2026 have now been produced and agreed by the Trustees. Our income has been very low across this year with just 15 Donations received (11 Individuals, 4 religious organisations). We managed to limit our expenditure but needed to move some funds from a Term Deposit into the General account. If you would like a copy of the 2025/2026 Financial Statement please email your request to treasurer@rdc.org.nz

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RDC Annual Appeal

October is our Annual Appeal month. This year a generous supporter has begun this with a sizable donation, and the promise to match your donations made during October. This means that your \$50 becomes \$100 for the RDC. We are happy to receive any amount you feel able to give so the work of the RDC can continue. Amounts over \$5 are liable for tax rebate as the RDC is a registered Charity. #CC52791

If this is your first time to donate to the RDC, please complete



The Contact Form on our website so that you can be issued with a tax receipt in April next year. Go to : <https://rdc.org.nz/donations/> If we already have these details, please deposit your donation into our Kiwi Bank account : **Religious Diversity Centre 38-9017-0433364-00** Please add your Surname and initials in the 'particulars' space so we can match the donation with the correct person. Thank you for considering making a donation.

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RDC Climate Action Group 'Open Letter' to Parliamentarians

On Tuesday, 15 September, the Climate Action Group of the Religious Diversity Centre Aotearoa New Zealand issued an Open Letter to **all** political candidates, parties, and parliamentarians, urging **urgent** climate action for our country. The Open Letter was endorsed by 158 diverse faith leaders, communities, organisations and individuals. The letter, titled *Care for Our Common Home*, emphasises the moral, environmental, and socio-economic imperatives of addressing climate change, as a critical issue for New Zealand's future and global responsibilities. <https://rdc.org.nz/climate-action-open-letter/>

A unique dimension of the letter is its positive focus. It frames climate action as a huge opportunity to enhance New Zealand's economic and social resilience, with many co-benefits. Adaptation policies can lower long-term economic costs, protect infrastructure, and improve food and water security. But adaptation measures can't be sustainable if emissions keep rising, so mitigation must receive at least equal

That same day, a formal presentation of the Open Letter also took place at the Theatre in Parliament. Sponsored by the Hon. Dr. Deborah Russell, Labour spokesperson for Climate Change, who graciously invited Greens Associate Climate Spokesperson, Francisco Hernandez to accept the Open Letter with her. The event attracted some thirty people, from New Plymouth, Palmerston North and the religious, social service and political community in Wellington. Check out the full Report appended to this Newsletter or find



it on-line at https://rdc.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/2026_09_Open_Letter_Presentation_Report.pdf

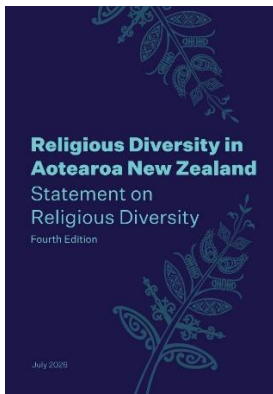
At this event to present the Open Letter on climate change to Parliament, a highlight was comments made on the Open Letter by three Wellington faith leaders. The three invited speakers were Father Gerard Burns - Vicar-General in the Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington; Mr Paul Barber - a senior parishioner from St. Andrews on the Terrace Wellington and member of its Sustainability Group; and Ms Ronja Levers - co-manager of the Soka Gakkai Buddhist Institute. Each of these speakers in their comments provided the audience profound insights relevant to our human condition in relation to our environment, and also deep insights into their own faiths and institutions. You can find summaries of their comments on the RDC website at : https://rdc.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/2026_09_Open_Letter_Function_Comments.pdf



(Thanks to Martin de Jong, Caritas, for the photographs)

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National Statement on Religious Diversity



RDC Trustee Paul Morris worked with commissioners at the Human Rights Commission to produce a re-print of the National Statement on Religious Diversity. This resource was given an official launch both Auckland and Wellington in early July. The RDC has been involved with the previous issues of this booklet, and Paul was the driving force behind the first edition.

Under the NZ Bill of Rights manifesting / living out one's religious convictions is considered a 'human right' so this booklet is a helpful guide in situations where discrimination on religious grounds might be claimed. This resource can be accessed on the Human Rights Commission Website at :

<https://tikatangata.org.nz/cms/assets/Documents/Statement-on-Religious-Diversity-2026-Statement-on-Religious-Diversity-Fourth-Edition.pdf> or on the RDC website at : <https://rdc.org.nz/resources/>

Te Kāhui Tika Tangata / HRC will send you hard copies of this resource if you make such a request.

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Religious Leaders Forum

Our Annual Religious Leaders Forum will take place on **Tuesday November 24th**. This year we meet in Wellington and our keynote speaker will be Human Rights Commissioner Melissa Derby. It seems a number of our contacts have left their roles as **national / organisational leaders** of some of the religious organisations. If you are in such a role ask us for an invitation. If you know the name / contacts for someone new in such a role with your religious organisation please let us know their details so we can update our database. Please email such details to admin@rdc.org.nz.

<https://rdc.org.nz/religious-leaders-forum/> is where you can find out more about this annual event.

2025 Forum



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RDC Re-Set Hui

Now in our 11th year of operation, we are keen reflect and discern our on-going contribution to religious community and our wider New Zealand society. We have received some funding to host a Re-Set Hui and have secured an external facilitator. This will be in Wellington on **Wednesday November 25th** - the day following the Religious Leaders Forum, as some people may be attending both events. Attendees will

include present, past, future Trustees, leaders of religious organisations which have partnered with us and supported our work, other partners and funders, some government departments.

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Trustee vacancies

We are looking to appoint up to five Trustees to add to fresh ideas, connections, and enthusiasm to the Trust Board which oversees the work and provides a reflective governance for all we do. We are required to have Trustees from at least three different religious communities – and the current five already meet that criteria. If you think this might be something you could offer please get in touch with us on either admin@rdc.org.nz or directly with Ricky at treasurer@rdc.org.nz. Or perhaps you know of someone who we might approach for this role, Please do let us know names and contacts and why you think they would be suitable – again please email admin@rdc.org.nz. There is an interview and selection process.

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Administrator (Auckland based) needed from January 2027

Or perhaps you, or someone you know, might be interested in finding out more about an Administrator role with RDC. Mary Nissen, who has been in this role for the past five years finishes with us in November. Please contact us on admin@rdc.org.nz to express your interest and for further details.

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Don't forget to vote reflectively on November 7th, please do consider making a donation to the RDC, and we look forward to seeing some of you at next year's National InterFaith Forum in Dunedin.



*National
Interfaith Forum*

*Seeds of Unity
Fruits of Hope*

Dunedin, Aotearoa New Zealand
Weekend of 13th and 14th of March, 2027
Hosted by the Dunedin Interfaith Council



Click or scan the QR code to register your interest and find more information.

Poipōia te kākano
kia puāwai -
Nurture the seed and it
will blossom

Presentation to Parliament of Open Letter to Care for Our Common Home

On Tuesday, 15 September, the Climate Action Group of the Religious Diversity Centre Aotearoa New Zealand issued an Open Letter to **all** political candidates, parties, and parliamentarians, urging **urgent** climate action for our country (<https://rdc.org.nz/climate-action-open-letter/>). The Open Letter was endorsed by 158 diverse faith leaders, communities, organisations and individuals. The letter, titled *Care for Our Common Home*, emphasises the moral, environmental, and socio-economic imperatives of addressing climate change, as a critical issue for New Zealand's future and global responsibilities.

A unique dimension of the letter is its positive focus. It frames climate action as a huge opportunity to enhance New Zealand's economic and social resilience, with many co-benefits. Adaptation policies can lower long-term economic costs, protect infrastructure, and improve food and water security. But adaptation measures can't be sustainable if emissions keep rising, so mitigation must receive at least equal attention.

This letter follows a book published last year (<https://rdc.org.nz/rdc-climate-action-group>). Whereas the Faith and Climate Action book stressed the educational/ Awareness and activist/ Action dimension of faith-based climate action, the Open Letter is about Advocacy for environmental wellbeing upon which human beings depend.

That same day, a formal presentation of the Open Letter also took place at the Theatrette in Parliament. Sponsored by the Hon. Dr. Deborah Russell, Labour spokesperson for Climate Change, who graciously invited Greens Associate Climate Spokesperson, Francisco Hernandez to accept the Open Letter with her, the event attracted some thirty people, from New Plymouth, Palmerston North and the religious, social service and political community in Wellington. Many members of the Wellington Interfaith Council were present.

Paul Blaschke, convenor of the RDC Climate Action Group, was MC, and Mary Eastham, as Trustee of the RDC, presented the Open Letter to Deborah Russell and Francisco Hernandez, who spoke afterwards about what the Open Letter meant to both of them as members of Parliament. They acknowledged the unique responsibility and role government had in prioritising environmental protection and sustainable development in policy discussions and decisions.

The interfaith dimension of the event was exquisite. Hindu interfaith leader, Manish Kaushik, chanted the opening prayer and connected our urgent call for climate action to the recent tragedy in Nepal because we are all part of a global community called to care when disaster strikes.

Mons. Gerard Burns, Vicar-General, Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington, underscored that the very title of the Open Letter— To Care for Our Common Home — highlights the moral truth that the Earth belongs to us all, because it is a gift from God, and thus the only appropriate response from a person of faith is to see the Earth as gift, and care for it accordingly. In a gesture of cultural respect, Mons. Burns predicated his remarks with a formal greeting in Te Reo Māori.

Paul Barber from St. Andrews on the Terrace Wellington, shared a special message from Rev. Fei Taule'ale'ausuma from Samoa, of our responsibility to our Pacific Island neighbours who are currently paying a very high price for a crisis they did nothing to create. Thus, the responsibility of all people of good will, people of faith as well as people who care, is to phase out fossil fuels and make a just transition to clean energy.

The word "transformation" was central to the message of Ronja Levers from Soka Gakkai Buddhist community. For people to see themselves as connected to the earth and to one another, transformation in the way we think and see things is vital. Ronja pointed to the efforts of Buddhist peacemaker, Daisaku Ikeda:

Buddhist philosopher, peacemaker, and founder of Soka Gakkai International, Daisaku Ikeda called for many decades for efforts to realise peace and human security. In his annual peace proposals he submitted to the United Nations for 40 years, he strongly emphasised that because global crises are created by humans, our capacity to resolve them also lies within human beings themselves, particularly through a transformation in the

way we think, act and relate to one another. Taking responsibility for transforming our own lives is the first step towards creating a society based on compassion and respect for the dignity of all life.

For the Climate Action Group, the Open Letter is both a moral and strategic call for such a transformation within the hearts and minds of New Zealand's political leaders. If our political leaders could heed the call to prioritise climate action at this critical moment in the history of humanity, this achievement could be linked to other proud moments in New Zealand's history of progressive global leadership—such as women's suffrage and nuclear-free policies—to inspire collective action. Through equitable climate action, Aotearoa NZ can uphold its reputation as a clean, green nation while securing a sustainable future. The message is clear: visionary leadership for urgent action is essential.

Mary Eastham