

National Interfaith Forum

Report back from afternoon discussion groups

Education:

- The enormous problem of resistance to 'education about religions' in the school, parents and community
- This resistance needs to be overcome by education such as:
 - teacher training in the teacher training colleges
 - In the community through some of us organising group visits to religious places such as those organised by the Spirit of Rangatahi
 - In the extra-curricula activities of young people such as Scouting (which offers a Religious Diversity badge) – this can include visits to religious places when parents are just as eager as the young people to join in

Employment

- Interfaith groups have the opportunity to support the government in the support, orientation and development of immigrant people
- The greater flexibility of the Holidays Act means employees can state time off within the work year as holidays – without needing to give religious festivals as reason
- Unions be encouraged to include relevant clauses from the Act in collective agreements
- Interfaith groups and religious leaders can offer themselves as resource to employers and employees concerning different ethnic and faith backgrounds
- Interfaith Councils could act as channel for people taking up tasks in the social justice groups in the religious communities
- See to the provision of full job descriptions of fixed term contracts for religious leaders coming into New Zealand thus ensuring full worker rights covered by New Zealand Law

Religious Institutions

- The challenge from the fundamentalist branches of the Christian churches to interfaith activity
- A positive opportunity seen in the formation of the Interfaith Commission of the Catholic Church
- Also a Catholic parish in Whanganui has formed an interfaith committee
- The Presbyterian Church has formally accepted the Statement on Religious Diversity
- A Progressive Jewish Synagogue is known to work with a Christian community ministry in humanitarian work
- An issue of concern is the need for sensitivity when Church leaders meet with the Government – should the leaders of all the religions meet with the Forum – but agreed it is better to meet at the grass roots level

- Care needs to be taken when the name of God is invoked
- Are the barriers we find more social than theological; fundamentalism is a real barrier

Family and Social Life

- The role of parents as central teachers of their children in matters of faith and attitudes to the religious faiths
- Agreed that leaving children to make their decision about membership of a religious faith - for fear of imposing a faith - is not a good model
- Inter-religious marriages are opening up opportunities even if it is not always easy
- A challenge for new immigrant families belonging to a culture in which child discipline involves smacking
- 'Skips' is a resource providing an alternative to this form of discipline
- People of non-Western cultures - when they are not as familiar with the language and culture - must find the New Zealand law about smacking difficult to understand
- People from other cultures sometimes find urban living in New Zealand difficult without the neighbourhood community support they are used to
- A mentoring programme can be helpful if run by different religious groups together; e.g. the Victory School in Nelson has become the hub of cultural life with English language classes and other activities
- With regard to men's violence the support of friendship between men is helpful

Community Groups

- When we look back to the 1970s there was no great use of Maori language – the fact of its use now is evidence that change in such matters is possible
- But such change requires effort
- The new diversity in New Zealand society means that the diversity of languages offers a real challenge
- Education and learning are necessary in families with inter-cultural marriages and in congregations and communities whose demographics have changed
- Street parties can help people get to know one another in the community
- The tendency in public policy to treat the human being as merely an economic unit needs to be checked