

**Te Whakatairanga i te
Nohotahitanga o ngā
Whakapono i Aotearoa**

**Promoting Interfaith
Relations in Aotearoa
New Zealand**

Second Edition



**New Zealand Catholic Bishops
Committee for Interfaith Relations**

The New Zealand Catholic Bishops Committee for Interfaith Relations was established in October 2009 with a mandate from the NZ Catholic Bishops Conference

- to further understanding, mutual respect and dialogue between the members of the Catholic Church and members of other faiths in New Zealand;
- to work with other faiths for the common good.

The committee is made up of representatives from each diocese in Aotearoa New Zealand and meets three times a year.

Acknowledgements

Archdiocese of Melbourne, Australia, who gave permission to adapt their document on Promoting Interfaith Relations (2009).

Human Rights Commission, New Zealand, for the National Statement on Religious Diversity.

Design

GH Typesetting, Dunedin

Photos

Sourced from Members of the NZCB Committee for Interfaith Relations or from public events and public web-posts (e.g., open access Interfaith Group Facebook pages). Thanks to all.

Inside front and back cover

L'Arche community (India) wall hanging, with symbols of major world religions to which their members belong.

Dunedin, October 2018

Te Whakatairanga i te Nohotahitanga o ngā Whakapono i Aotearoa



Promoting Interfaith Relations in Aotearoa New Zealand¹

Growing religious diversity, through the presence of peoples of other faiths in Aotearoa New Zealand, calls us to new ways of understanding and relating to the mission of the Church. The following guidelines² may be helpful for dioceses, parishes, schools and chaplaincies of Aotearoa New Zealand to assist in the promotion of interfaith relations.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide some guidance and encouragement for individuals to encounter one another within a faith perspective. It will enable us to seek opportunities for, and to have confidence in, acknowledging the beliefs and traditions of others while grounded in the taonga of our own deeply held faith for the mutual benefit of all.

1 These Guidelines are adapted with permission from the Archdiocese of Melbourne, Australia. The first edition of the Melbourne Guidelines were officially launched by Archbishop Denis J. Hart, 21 August 2007. A revised edition was approved by the Archbishop on 12 October 2009.

2 These guidelines draw in part on Guidelines for Multifaith Gatherings published by the Victorian Council of Churches in collaboration with Victorian Multicultural Commission; and on 'One Faith – Multifaith' – a theological basis for interfaith gatherings, published by the Victorian Council of Churches and available on its website.

.....

He Whakataki Introduction

It is now quite common for moments of celebration or tragedy to be marked by many faiths. Gatherings are often initiated by civic or government bodies in order to mirror the diverse nature of our society and to promote its harmony and wellbeing. Indeed, particular religious groups and local interfaith networks often arrange such events in their neighbourhoods.

It is, therefore, increasingly likely that the dioceses and parishes of Aotearoa New Zealand will be invited to take part in interfaith gatherings. If such occasions are to be truly spiritual, they cannot be simply a 'colourful' event or an empty ritual. They will ideally be structured and conducted in a way that participants draw nearer to the Divine Mystery.

In addition, individual members of the Church will find opportunities and situations in which they are called into dialogue and interaction with their neighbours of other faiths and cultures.



A prayer for Peace, Sacred Heart Cathedral, Wellington.

It requires participants to dialogue with respect, not necessarily in agreement; it invites them to acknowledge that what is heard may indeed proceed from the depths of the Divine Mystery. It does not preclude robust debate if this is done with courtesy and without antagonism, but is based on a spirituality of communion and a commitment to a practical concern for every human being.

A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly but also as a 'gift for me.'⁶
(Pope John Paul II)

Interreligious dialogue is a powerful witness in the face of an increasingly secularised world. By emphasising common values such as love of God and love of neighbour, it seeks to promote cooperation and solidarity among people of faith in acting for social justice, moral values, peace and liberty in our society.

Some shared thoughts⁷

From the NZ Catholic Bishops Committee for Interfaith Relations (NZCBCIR)

"It's not about philosophies, it's about human beings and welcome."

"Encounter with others can really strengthen your own faith."

"It may seem complex but just be yourself. It's as simple or difficult as human relationships."

"It's all through our scripture... Welcome the stranger... Love your neighbour as yourself..."

⁶ 'At the Beginning of the New Millennium' (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*), par. 43.

⁷ Gleanings from an NZCBCIR committee meeting in March 2018.



Dunedin Interfaith Council 2017.

"Interfaith encounter is an opportunity to move beyond tolerance. To move from finding fault towards shared understanding."

"We've never encountered another religion or faith. But, we've been blessed with meeting individuals who have different beliefs from our own. Understanding grows deeper in dialogue than in watching news clips."

The world in which we live is often marked by conflicts, violence and war, but it earnestly longs for peace, peace which is above all a gift from God, peace for which we must pray without ceasing. Yet peace is also a duty to which all peoples must be committed, especially those who profess to belong to religious traditions. Our efforts to come together and foster dialogue are a valuable contribution to building peace on solid foundations.⁸
(Pope Benedict XVI)

⁸ Address of Pope Benedict XVI to the delegates of other churches and ecclesial communities and of other religious traditions, 25 April 2005.

WĀHANGA II: Ngā Whakapono Rerekē i Aotearoa

PART II: Religious Diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand

Statement on Religious Diversity

The Statement on Religious Diversity was first published in 2007 (revised in 2009 and 2018) and has since been endorsed by a wide range of faith communities. It provides a basis for ongoing discussion of religious diversity in New Zealand, and is available in a wide range of translations.

It acknowledges the place of the Treaty of Waitangi and Tangata Whenua in this land, and sets out a number of principles which are grounded in international human rights treaties and the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act, including:

- freedom of religion, conscience, and belief;
- freedom of expression;

- the right to safety and security; and
- the right to reasonable accommodation of diverse religious practices in various settings.

The statement also emphasises that the State seeks to treat all faith communities and those who profess no religion equally before the law, and that New Zealand has no official or established religion.

It encourages education about our diverse religious and spiritual traditions, respectful dialogue, and positive relationships between government and faith communities.

It offers a framework within which religious issues can be discussed both by faith communities themselves and within the wider New Zealand community.



National Interfaith Forum 2018.

WĀHANGA III: Te Whakawhitiwhiti Kōrero

PART III: Interreligious Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities. This dialogue is in first place a conversation about human existence or simply, as the bishops of India have put it, a matter of “being open to them, sharing their joys and sorrows”.⁹ (Pope Francis)

The following four types of dialogue¹⁰ are not mutually exclusive and in practice overlap. All forms of dialogue can be carried out in parishes and agencies to a greater or lesser extent.

1. Dialogue of everyday life where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations, developing individual friendships based on mutual trust which may lead to sharing their religious beliefs and experiences.

Examples in New Zealand:

- Catholics often respond to invitations to take part in multi-faith groups, e.g., Regional Interfaith Councils; Councils of Christians and Jews, Abrahamic Faiths, Islamic Associations;
- The New Zealand Catholic Bishops Committee for Interfaith Relations sends letters of greeting to members of various faith traditions on the occasion of their major feasts;
- Members of the Canterbury interfaith

community play a significant role in planning and leading the annual memorial of those whose lives were lost in the 2011 earthquake.

Suggestions:

- Contact your local interfaith group and attend interreligious meetings and gatherings in your local area;
- Invite into your home neighbours and/or work colleagues who may be of other faiths;
- Organise community and parish activities, e.g. picnics.

2. Dialogue of action in which Christians and others collaborate for the preservation of the environment, and for the integral development and liberation of people.

Examples in New Zealand:

- Interfaith networks have been formed in many regions with the aim of fostering harmonious relations and community service, such as welcoming refugees and providing migrant support.
- Several interfaith groups have taken part in treeplanting projects in public reserves, or shoreline restoration.
- Many interfaith groups are strongly advocating, at local and/or national levels, for action in response to climate change.
- Roncalli College students are supporting “Seafarers” in Oamaru, helping welcome sailors of various faiths who are far from home.
- In 2018, an Interfaith Women’s Event was held in Palmerston North with the theme: “Interfaith Women Resist the Climate of Hatred and Fear.”

⁹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 250. 2013

¹⁰ The definitions are based on *Dialogue and Proclamation* published by Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Rome, 1991.

Suggestions:

- Take part in interfaith activities co-ordinated by local interfaith networks;
- Arrange neighbourhood gatherings to address issues such as drug addiction, youth unemployment, resettlement difficulties;
- Defend each other in cases of vilification or harassment;
- Arrange for someone on your local parish pastoral council to liaise with other faith communities to represent the parish on the local interfaith network.

3. Dialogue of theological exchange where dialogue partners seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages and to appreciate each other's spiritual beliefs and values.

Examples in New Zealand:

- Interfaith evenings of exchange on life transitions, understanding interfaith relations, facing social change;
- The Dunedin Abrahamic Interfaith Group, with the University of Otago tertiary chaplaincy, hosts an annual Peace Lecture, having begun in 2004;
- The New Zealand National Interfaith Forum generally occurs every 2-3 years in a different regional centre;
- The NZCBCIR has organised a range of speakers from different faiths, over the years, to speak in various diocese. Members of the committee also follow invitations to speak at diocesan meetings and gatherings.

Suggestions:

- Attend and promote the increasing number of interfaith conferences, discussions, public lectures, workshops etc., on interfaith topics.



Waikato Interfaith Council 2017.

- Convene a study group in your parish or pastoral area on Church documents about interreligious dialogue; call on a facilitator or tutor to guide you in your study.
- Invite capable individuals to give a presentation, and encourage dialogue, within your own community.

4. Dialogue of religious experience where persons, grounded in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, ceremonies and places of worship.



Examples in New Zealand:

- We can accept invitations from other religious groups to attend, as observers, their important celebrations or to visit their places of worship, e.g., Eid or other Ramadan gatherings, Vesakh, Diwali, Sukkoth and Hannukah.
- Interfaith gatherings involving Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Baha'i

and others have taken place at various venues. These have included events held to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Assisi World Day of Prayer for Peace, organised by Pope John Paul II in 1986.

- Many interfaith groups gather in October each year for the “Week for World Peace”. These are wonderful opportunities to experience the prayer of others and to pray alongside each other in a shared hope for peace.

Suggestions:

- Attend ceremonies in synagogues, mosques, or temples, if invited;
- Accept invitations to iftar meals with Muslims during the month of Ramadan;
- Take part in the annual Shoah Memorial Service.

5. Less well known, but equally important is the INNER DIALOGUE. This happens when we choose to engage honestly and prayerfully with the questions and inner struggles that arise in contact with believers of another faith, and their belief systems.

It is this inner dialogue of each individual, and each faith community, that makes all other forms of dialogue authentic, purifies it from self-seeking and hidden motives, and enables a genuine encounter with the other and with God.¹¹

Practical Notes

Hospitality: Participants vary greatly in attitude to the dietary requirements of their religion. It is often best to seek advice, however, vegetarian food is usually acceptable to most faiths. If you are bringing ‘a plate’ to a shared meal simply mention to

¹¹ Sr Catherine Jones (past chair of NZCBCIR). Public presentation, Wellington, 2012.

the host what is in your food when you arrive. Similarly, greetings can vary between cultures and religious traditions. Follow the example of others and avoid taking or giving offense. Hand-shaking, for example, will vary between traditions and genders, and it is important to participate in such introductions and greetings warmly and humbly.

When visiting sacred spaces individuals may be asked to take off their shoes, and/or cover their head or legs. This is simply a mark of respect for the tradition of the hosts. It is good to be prepared for this.

Special life ceremonies: Marriages, funerals and other events may also involve people from different religious traditions who wish that the ceremony reflect their diversity. The Catholic liturgical rituals for weddings and funerals are clearly prescribed in the Catholic tradition and will usually be expected by members of other traditions when attending a Catholic ceremony. However, it may be necessary to include elements from other traditions (within the limits prescribed by the Church) in some appropriate way. This will require both pastoral sensitivity and fidelity to Catholic tradition.¹²

As a Catholic attending such events within another faith tradition the general approach mentioned on page 11 will apply. Often, care will be taken to explain and welcome those unfamiliar with the ceremony but there may be times when individuals need to draw on their own formed conscience in terms of participation. Sometimes surprises are unavoidable, but try and seek advice to prepare beforehand if possible.

¹² “When, on the occasion of weddings or funerals or other celebrations, Christians and Muslims remain in silent respect at the others’ prayer, they bear witness to what unites them without disguising or denying the things that separate.” Pope John Paul II at the Great Mosque in Damascus, 2001.

WĀHANGA IV: Te inoi tahi – te nohotahi rānei ki te inoi?

PART IV: Praying together – or coming together to pray?

1. The challenge

Jews, Christians and Muslims all address prayer to the one God whom Abraham worshipped. All three religious traditions also contain strict warnings against worshipping other gods. Christian prayer is made specifically “through Jesus Christ our Lord”, the Son of God.

Hindus, as one example from another faith perspective, address prayer either each to their chosen deity or to none, for the various Hindu traditions view Ultimate Reality differently, some in personal terms, others impersonally. All faiths have their own traditions and understandings in regard to prayer. Thus, the term ‘prayer’ in its usual sense may be ambiguous or inappropriate.

So, if there is no common understanding of what prayer is or in what circumstances it is appropriate, is it possible to pray together at all?

2. A solution

When Christians gather together with people of different faiths, they do so with the presumption – at once both humble and daring – that God may speak to them in and through those whose beliefs are not necessarily shared.

In 1986, Pope John Paul II invited the world’s religious leaders to Assisi for a gathering that would “certainly not be religious syncretism but a sincere attitude of prayer to God in an atmosphere of mutual respect.”¹³ On that occasion he gave an example of ways in which Christians and those of other faiths may

¹³ Pope John Paul II, General Audience, 22 October 1986.

legitimately “come together in order to pray”.

In this way we “manifest our respect for the prayer of others and for the attitude of others before the Divinity; at the same time we offer them the humble and sincere witness of our faith in Christ, the Lord of the Universe.”¹⁴

As a result we sense their faith and observe that God’s Word is also at work in them, and so we are caught up in the Word of God together. The purpose of the interfaith gathering then consists primarily not in speaking but in attending silently to the God who has spoken and still speaks. Indeed, many spiritual traditions agree that as prayer deepens it enters further into silence.

Bishop Peter Cullinane, Bishop Emeritus of Palmerston North, prefaced an invitation to multi-faith prayer in the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit with these words: “This service

¹⁴ Pope John Paul II, General Audience, 22 October 1986.



Palmerston North Interfaith Group with Bishop Emeritus Peter Cullinane.



Interfaith Group meeting on Araiteuru Marae.

is not joint worship; it is a time of standing alongside one another as we each pray in our own way for the needs of humankind."¹⁵

3. In practice

Even when people know the concept it can be difficult to know what to 'do' when praying in an interfaith setting. Some suggestions are:

- Be respectful and courteous.
- Allow space for God to speak. Don't spend all the time thinking. Listen.
- If leading a prayer, make an effort for it to be inclusive and appropriate.
- It's OK not to 'join in' with everything that is prayed. No one should pray words that feel wrong. But, avoid being

disrespectful. Remember that it is often enough to be standing alongside another person in prayer.

• Some of the most familiar and comfortable aspects of our own prayer life can be out of place in an interfaith context. Be aware. (e.g., don't start with a sign of the Cross just out of habit.)

¹⁵ Bishop Peter Cullinane, quoted on the cover sheet of the 25th Anniversary Assisi Day of Prayer for World Peace, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Palmerston North, 27 October 2011.

ĀPITIHANGA I: Ngā Hononga me ngā Whakapānga

APPENDIX I: Links and Contacts

(N.B. The groups below are not an exhaustive list. Any significant omission is likely to simply be the result of the committee not being aware of an appropriate link.)

Catholic

New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference (NZCBC)

www.catholic.org.nz/about-us/nzcbc/

New Zealand Catholic Bishops Committee for Interfaith Relations

www.catholic.org.nz/about-us/nzcbc/#section_24

Auckland Diocesan Commission for Ecumenism and Interfaith Relations

<http://www.aucklandcatholic.org.nz/pastoral-evangelisation/ecumenism/commission-for-ecumenism-interfaith-relations/>

International interfaith dialogue

Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/index.htm

World Council of Churches

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us>

World Conference of Religions for Peace

<https://rfp.org/about/leadership/world-council/>

International Council of Christians and Jews

<http://www.iccj.org/>

Interfaith Calendar

www.interfaithcalendar.org

New Zealand National Interfaith networks

NZ Interfaith Group

www.interfaith.org.nz

The Religious Diversity Centre

www.rdc.org.nz

Dunedin Abrahamic Interfaith Group

www.dunedininterfaith.net.nz

Dunedin Interfaith Council

[www.facebook.com/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/1566890406855982/)

[groups/1566890406855982/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1566890406855982/)

Canterbury Interfaith Society

www.canterburyinterfaith.org.nz/

Wellington Abrahamic Council

<https://abrahamic.nz/>

Wellington Interfaith Community

www.facebook.com/Wellington-Interfaith-Community-173916806148316/

Palmerston North Interfaith Group

maeastham23@gmail.com

Waikato Interfaith Council

<https://www.waikato-interfaith.org/>

Auckland Interfaith Council

<http://www.aucklandinterfaithcouncil.org.nz/>

Other World Religions in New Zealand

Baha'i Faith New Zealand

www.bahai.org.nz

The New Zealand Buddhist Council

www.buddhistcouncil.org.nz

Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (NZ)

<http://familyfedihq.org/tag/new-zealand/>

The Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand

www.fianz.co.nz

Jewish New Zealand

www.haruth.com/jw/JewsNewZealand.html

New Zealand Sikh Society Hamilton

www.newzealandsikh.co.nz/



ĀPITIHANGA II: Kuputaka

APPENDIX II: Glossary

Dialogue: Cooperative, constructive, and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, faiths and/or spiritual beliefs, at both the individual and institutional levels.

Evangelise/Evangelisation: The proclamation of Christ and his Gospel by word and the testimony of life, in fulfilment of Christ's command, not to be confused with proselytism.

Interfaith / Interreligious: Describes the deliberate interaction of persons of two or more religious faiths or religions. Both terms are commonly used interchangeably, as in this document. However, some theologians and sociologists may use them differently. A person of faith may not necessarily belong to a formal religious organisation.

• **Multifaith / Multireligious:** Describes a sense of affinity with aspects of more than one religion. In this document, the terms are used interchangeably.

• **Proselytise / Proselytism:** The act of seeking converts to one's own religion in a manner that violates the freedom of the other, and precludes the grace of God. The purpose of interfaith dialogue is to foster understanding and mutual co-operation, not to engineer conversion to one's own point of view or belief.

• **Relativism:** The belief that all faiths and their respective theological beliefs are equally valid depending on the person involved.

• **Syncretism:** A blending of practices and beliefs from two or more religions to such a degree that the specific character of the tradition and belief is obscured or lost.



Exploring Sacred Spaces. Auckland 2017.

ĀPITIHANGA III: Ētahi kōrero mō te nohotahitanga o te tangata

Appendix III: Some stories from the dialogue of life and action.

Young people leading

Throughout Aotearoa NZ, youth and university students are co-ordinating gatherings and events to develop their own skills, actions and leadership, often supported by regional interfaith groups.

Responding

In September 2010, Samoa was hit by a tsunami that claimed over 100 lives and caused loss of property. The New Zealand Jewish community knew how important the Bible was to Samoans in re-making their lives, and arranged for several shipments of the Bible in Samoan to be sent to them.

Answering

When Christchurch was struck by an earthquake that claimed 182 lives, and loss of homes and property, the Auckland Buddhist community pitched in with financial, material and spiritual help.

Visiting

In 2017, the Auckland Interfaith Council arranged their first “Exploring Sacred Spaces”. This was an opportunity to see and hear about significant places of worship within the local community.



Writing

When Jewish graves were desecrated in 2015, letters were written to the local newspaper and the national Jewish community, expressing sorrow and solidarity in the face of such violence.

Singing

An interfaith choir grew out of the Waikato Interfaith Council and gathers regularly to practice and perform. Songs are carefully chosen to be meaningful, joyful and inclusive.



“Sounds of the Sacred” Auckland 2018.

The following is a variation on the prayer of St Francis that Mother Teresa prayed when she addressed the United Nations in 1985:

Make us worthy Lord to serve all those who live and die in poverty and hunger.

Give them through our hands, this day, their daily bread; and by our understanding love, give them your peace and joy.

Lord, make me a channel of your peace.

That where there is hatred, I may bring love,

That where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness,

That where there is discord, I may bring harmony,

That where there is error, I may bring truth,

That where there is doubt, I may bring faith,

That where there is despair, I may bring hope,

That where there are shadows, I may bring light,

That where there is sadness, I may bring joy.

Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted,

To understand than to be understood,

To love than to be loved.

For it is in forgetting self that one finds.

It is by forgiving that one is forgiven,

It is by dying that one awakens to eternal life.

Amen.

For more information:
**NEW ZEALAND CATHOLIC BISHOPS
COMMITTEE FOR INTERFAITH RELATIONS**

**Catholic Centre
PO Box 1937
Wellington 6140**

Interfaith@nzcbc.org.nz

https://www.catholic.org.nz/about-us/nzcbc/#section_24



Surely the fostering of unity is a noble task which is incumbent upon all who have at heart the good of the whole human family. It is my hope that interreligious and ecumenical cooperation will demonstrate that men and women do not have to forsake their identity, whether ethnic or religious, in order to live in harmony with their brothers and sisters.

(Pope Francis in his address to an Ecumenical and Inter-religious gathering in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2015)