

## 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