

New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Committee for Interfaith Relations

18 March 2019

Dear brothers and sisters in Aotearoa New Zealand,

It is with profound sadness that we grieve for the deaths and injury of Muslims in Christchurch through the violence of extremists. We grieve too for the loss of a sense of safety and peace for all Muslims in this land in the face of such an attack. Every Kiwi, new or old, now feels our heart touched by the evil of hatred. The stark reality that our neighbours could do such a thing moves us to an even deeper awareness of the overwhelming need for love to be the driving force in our relationships with one another, rather than animosity or narrow-mindedness.

As a committee and as individuals we have formed many wonderful relationships with Muslim friends and acquaintances. We have been blessed by dialogue which has revealed the beauty and peace of those who live a religion of prayer, generosity and belief in the same God of Abraham in whom we believe. Our practices and understandings regarding faith may be different in many ways, but there is much we share and celebrate. Our differences are an opportunity to engage with one another, never a reason for division.

While our hearts go out to our Muslim brothers and sisters in their loss, pain and fear, we wish to draw attention away from the murder and violence towards the need for each of us to open our hearts to those of different cultures and faiths. We pray not just for healing of the injured and comfort to those who mourn, but for a renewed outreach to others in love, kindness and welcome.

The displays of grief and compassion exhibited by so many people since this terrible atrocity signal hope. They reveal the larger truth of humanity in response to a closed hatred. We need to continue to practically reach out to one another in friendship and kindness. It needs to be more than a moment in time but a habit of life. Ultimately it is a personal choice, in our context, to do as Jesus did – to smother hatred through reaching out with physical hands and loving our neighbour.

We especially hold our Muslim friends in prayer at this time and we pray for all peoples and all faiths. May we be instruments of peace to one another so that all may feel safe and loved.

Peace, Salaam,

Colin MacLeod

On behalf of committee members:

+Michael Dooley, Colin MacLeod (chair), Mary Eastham, Adele Churchman, Teresa Fernandez, Matthew Gardner, Daniel Kleinsman, Beate Matthies and Christopher Longhurst

* The NZCBCIR has produced a small booklet, *Promoting Interfaith Relations*, which might help with some ideas and suggestions for supporting the building of relationships.
The link is: www.catholic.org.nz/assets/PromotingInterfaithRelations.pdf