

From the Chair

At our May meeting we accepted David Kitchingman's challenge to look at our own faith journey through our emotions at the time. This is really relevant when we are young, when emotions attach to all that we do and learn, before rational thought takes over. This approach developed a very interesting and helpful conversation.

Also at our May meeting we decided we would not meet over the winter months. June is too dark to be enticed out to an evening meeting, and the winter weather of July and August make evening meetings difficult too. So we will look forward to our next event, on 20 September. The flowers will be out and the sap rising

Meantime, I'm delighted to say, Alan will work to maintain our monthly newsletter with the help of any and all readers – if you come across an article good enough to share, then please let Alan know. Our interests are eclectic, and we value a new look at an old topic as well as a new look at a new one.

Gretchen

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**Report on the Open Education Programme
held at the Mornington Methodist Church on
May 16th 2018**

The speaker at this meeting was Professor Paul Morris from the Religious Studies, Art History and Classics Department at Victoria University. He has been given the task of updating the National Statement on Religious Diversity. This statement was first produced by Professor Morris in 2007 in response to the huge growth of

religious diversity in New Zealand. It has been translated into several languages and is made available at numerous venues for new migrants. A copy of the 8 points in the present statement follows.

A framework for the recognition of New Zealand's diverse faith communities and their harmonious interaction with each other, with government and with other groups in society:

1. The State and Religion: The State seeks to treat all faith communities and those who profess no religion equally before the law. New Zealand has no state religion.
2. The Right to Religion: New Zealand upholds the right to freedom of religion and belief and the

Winter Recess

No Meeting

June
July
August

Reconvene

20th September

right to freedom from discrimination on the grounds of religious or other belief.

3. **The Right to Safety:** Faith communities and their members have a right to safety and security of their person and property.

4. **The Right of Freedom of Expression:** The right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media are vital for democracy, but should be exercised with responsibility.

5 **Recognition and Accommodation:** Reasonable steps shall be taken in educational and work environments and in the delivery of public services to recognise and accommodate diverse religious beliefs and practices.

6. **Education:** Schools should teach an understanding of the diversity of religious and spiritual traditions in a manner that reflects the community of which the school is a part.

7. **Religious Differences:** Debate and disagreement about religious beliefs within faith communities and beyond will occur and should be exercised within the rule of law and without resort to violence.

8. **Cooperation and understanding:** Government and faith communities have a responsibility to build and maintain positive relationships with each other, and promote mutual respect and understanding.

We were privileged to hear an excellent presentation by Professor Morris who provided much statistical data from recent censuses. I found it quite surprising to learn that New Zealand is one of the leading countries for religious diversity, coming 15th out of 132 countries. This is despite the fact that an increasing number of both Pakeha and Maori New Zealanders are choosing ‘no religion’ on the census paper. This reflects the enormous increase in new migrants, with their various religious faiths, in the country over the last few decades.

Professor Morris acknowledged that New Zealand has not been faced with the violence and discord associated with religion that afflicts so many areas

of the world but he also stressed that there are many challenges where religious faith and practice collide and it is imperative that we build and maintain respectful relations with people of other faiths and that everyone living in New Zealand be given the same rights and freedoms. If we do not do this the consequences, in Professor Morris’s word, will be “dire”.

At our last Sea of Faith meeting David Kitchingman produced for us his vision of a future where the past dominant Christian religion of Western Society will give way to a much broader multi faith society. I quote: “ In the future beyond our own end and conceivably in a much diminished state of organized Christianity, the legacy of faith will not depend on the cognitive framework in which it has been passed on so far. Grace, love and fellowship will never be exclusively mediated ‘through Jesus Christ our Lord’. Rather it will be the affirmative communal feelings fostered by many faith communities that will really matter.” If all the religious faiths represented in our country can view the future in this way we can indeed look forward to the future with optimism. The national statement on Religious Diversity is a huge step in this direction and we all need to familiarise ourselves with it.

Marjorie Spittle

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The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.

Søren Kierkegaard

“What day is it?”

It's today," squeaked Piglet.

My favourite day," said Pooh.”

AA Milne

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