

CANADIAN INTERFAITH CONVERSATION

February 17, 2:30 (ET), 4:00 p.m. (NLTime)

Via Zoom

Presentation: Religious Social Action Coalition of Newfoundland and Labrador (RSACNL)

Presenter: Marion Pardy (Very Rev. Dr.), Coordinator, RSACNL

In the Beginning...

The Religious Social Action Coalition of Newfoundland and Labrador is a 'child' of the St. John's and Area Council of Churches. In 2007, when the Council sponsored their annual Jewish, Christian, Muslim Dialogue, the topic was "Justice". Among the speakers were Arnold Bennett from Jewish Community Havura and Dr. Mahmoud Haddara from the Muslim community. Arnold's challenge is memorable. His concluding remarks claimed that if we really believed all that we said and heard this evening from the sacred teachings of our respective communities, there would not be anyone living in poverty in our province. A few weeks later, Arnold and Mahmoud held a gathering at the Mosque with an invitation to all interested persons. As a result of that meeting the Religious Social Action Coalition of Newfoundland and Labrador was formed with Arnold as the Coordinator and Mahmoud as Secretary. Two of the 'founding members' are still Directors today: Dr. Veeresh Gadag, Hindu Temple and George Powell, Baptist. Unfortunately, Arnold died a few years ago and Mahmoud moved to Ontario. We still miss their leadership, energy and commitment. Their 'spirit' and legacy live on in our on-going commitment to eliminate poverty in our province and country. Presently, we have directors from the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh faith communities.

What give life to our shared efforts today? Our commitment to interfaith cooperation and collaboration, and our vision and goals give life to our shared efforts today. In our diversity re different ways of liturgy and ceremony, different sacred texts, we hold in common our commitment to address the injustices of our society.

Vision: A short-hand version of our vision is to eliminate poverty in our province and country.

Goals:

- to see a guaranteed liveable income implemented in NL and in Canada;
- to advocate for a “Fairness Impact Study” on major government policies (that is, a ‘fairness’ test/instrument to apply to all major policies, similar to gender and environmental studies, with the goal of ‘fairness for all”).

A by-product of being multi-faith has been the privilege of participating in one another’s sacred spaces for meetings, and for special celebrations/ceremonies within a particular faith community. Through our meetings we become aware of special ‘holy days’ and events and we have a growing understanding of the core values and religious observances of each other. Since 2010 we have held 4 multi-faith prayer breakfasts, in conjunction with the St. John’s and Area Council of Churches, hosted by the Premier of the time. The format consisted of prayers for our leaders, province and country by each faith community represented, gifts of our sacred texts to the Premier and a presentation on poverty elimination by the RSAC Coordinator. This has resulted in follow-up meetings with the Premier and/or pertinent Ministers.

How is our work developing? We are most active during provincial and federal elections. During the present provincial election we sent letters to all candidates beseeching them to make 'binding' a Private Members Resolution on a basic income passed unanimously by Government in October 2020. We received positive responses from candidates in all 3 Parties of NDP, Liberal and PC. A follow-up Press Release resulted in significant media interviews – one, radio, two, TV and one a 'community sector' gathering of service providers.

What effect has the pandemic had? Unfortunately, the pandemic has prevented us from meeting in-person. We miss the physical environment of meeting in the spaces of one another, the informal relationships and the opportunity to explore seriously future directions.

What direction do you see your work going? We are committed multi-faith volunteers, with limited time and financial resources. More and more, we are connecting with other multi-faith groups and other organizations in the area of multi-faith understanding and in advocacy for a Guaranteed Liveable Income. Our on-going commitment and our growing connections, provincially and nationally, are two positive forward-looking directions.

How would a cross-Canada body like the Canadian Interfaith Conversation strengthen or encourage your work? The advantage of the CIC is that it gives us a 'place' and 'space' to share and learn from one another concerning multi-faith understanding and respect,³ and advocacy for a Guaranteed Liveable Income. Such conversations can only enhance our work.

How can your work and relationships shape the work of the Canadian Interfaith Conversation? From the beginning the RSAC worked hard at being 'multi-faith'.

This was enabled initially because the primary leadership was from the Jewish and Muslim communities. Inasmuch as possible, we attempt to work collegially and collaboratively with those in government and we are respected for this approach. One reason is that we 'live and move' with politicians and government staff in other 'circles' in our faith communities and organizations. This makes us more 'relational' and it also provides us with easier access to government offices for contacts, meetings, etc. I would propose that a collegial, collaborative approach is more advantageous to our cause of poverty elimination than an adversarial, confrontational approach. It also is core to our values as people of faith to treat all with dignity, respect and fairness.

Marion Pardy (Very Rev. Dr.)

Coordinator, Religious Social Action Coalition of Newfoundland and Labrador.