



12<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Aotearoa New Zealand,

At this time in particular we feel the powerful call to be people of peace. This beautiful concept is foundational in all religions, and in our shared Abrahamic tradition it is richly expressed through words such as Salaam and Shalom. If we allow it, the call to peace crosses all divides and draws not only our thoughts and actions towards non-violence, but also our hearts and prayers towards God. It is at such times as this that as people of faith we particularly consider what it means to be people of God.

We are conscious that our Muslim brothers and sisters are asking us to pray, and especially to pray for peace this March. They do not ask that we pray for those they believe have no need of our prayers – such as those who have already gone to God - but that we each acknowledge God who gives us life, loves us and draws us to live in harmony with one another; To call on God to help us reach out in love and kindness, to support us in sharing each other's burdens, to give us strength and courage to stand up against oppression and injustice; To pray for our world and all its peoples that we abandon a fixation with that which divides and embrace that which nurtures and blesses each of us - from the most vulnerable to the most strong. For all of us ultimately bow low before our God, and God's love is shared equally among all.

It is in this context that we recall the events of March 15, 2019 so that such a thing may never happen again. Our hearts continue to go out to the widows, children and others who have lost their loved ones, and to all family members and friends who remain devastated and struggling. We recall our nation's desire at the time to assist and show love for members of other faith communities and we pray that this same desire to reach out with love and compassion may remain part of all people's daily lives.

It is especially as people of deep conviction in our own personal and collective faith and commitment to peace that we say, "You are our friend." We do not need to be the same, we can be incredibly diverse – whether through religion, language, origin or body – but we are called to live as brothers and sisters. Difference is not a barrier, it is how we are made and we are made in the image of God.



So our hearts and minds come to focus on a response which is appropriate and meaningful for now, at this time. It is a response bound to peace and prayer. It calls for us to have courage and enthusiasm to actually enter into rich dialogue in the everyday life of living alongside one another. It seeks opportunity to share our understandings, joys and concerns not from a position of fear or suspicion but in a spirit of openness and trust. It requires we commit ourselves against hatred and for peace. It is especially as people of different faiths that we make this commitment.

As Pope Francis and Ahmed Al-Tayyeb capture so powerfully in their shared document on *Human Fraternity*<sup>1</sup>, “Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved.” This is how we are called to respond, this is what it means to be people of God.

Peace, Salaam,

Colin MacLeod

*Committee Members:*

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

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190204\\_documento-fratellanza-umana.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html)