

Race and Religion Event Report

Race & Religion: Cultivating Anti-Racist Faith Communities

Wednesday, February 3, 2021, 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm, via ZOOM

Participate in an engaging discussion on race, faith and fostering truly inclusive, anti-racist worship, spaces and faith communities.

How do we overcome Racism as people of faith?

Quotes from Event Attendees

“The event was indeed eye-opening in terms of realizing the inherent racism that is lingering in our communities. The program shed light on the root causes and offered practical solutions to overcome this problem.”

Ahmet Tahmalci, Intercultural Dialogue Institute

“I am now reminded that the multiplication of such [Race and Religion] events should no longer be considered a choice we arbitrarily make, but rather a responsibility we now must necessarily assume.”

*Rev. Damian MacPherson, SA
Past Director of the Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto*

“I was very impressed by the Toronto WIHW Race and Religion event. The Master of Ceremonies did an excellent job contextualizing the event. The panel moderator was very skillful in facilitating the three wonderful speakers. The fact that the speakers were young people was an added bonus. The teaching I appreciated in this session is that people who are different from me are not a problem or threat but rather a gift.”

Paul McKenna, Past World Interfaith Harmony Week Award Recipient

“This Race and Religion event was inspiring, heart-touching, and motivational. I was extremely pleased to hear the same prayers again at the end of the program and shared them on my social media accounts. I admired the diversity of the speakers and the roles that faith groups can play in this regard. Moreover, I loved the Breakout Rooms activity in the program. We had the chance to discuss in smaller groups the ways to encounter systematic racism in our societies.”

Imam Wael Shehab, Masjid Toronto

“In this time of pandemic when people run into their personal cave of fear, we need to be reminded as we gather online in these events of race and religion we listen with heart, see with our ears and learn with our eyes and remind each other that together we ignite the beacon of compassion, that together becomes the blazing sun of hope right now.”

Rev. Dr. John Joseph Mastandrea, Minister at Manor Road United Church

“Engaging in interfaith collaboration is integral to reshaping our identity as people of faith and will ensure we live out our faith through action and leadership. NMCLC’s event “Race & Religion: Cultivating Anti-Racist Communities” has made a phenomenal national impact on lives, both within and outside of the faith world

Shaila Kibria-Carter, Director of Interfaith Relations - Islamic Relief Canada

Event Summary and Achievements

- This was an annual NMCLC (National Muslim Christian Liaison Committee) event organized in collaboration with the IDI GTA (Intercultural Dialogue Institute GTA) and the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Toronto.
- The Race and Religion Event had a registration of 239 participants.
- Over 300 people watched the event Live on Facebook and YouTube that evening.
- This event truly adhered to the World Interfaith Harmony Week’s theme of "Extending Our Embrace" with diverse participants across Canada and some also joining from the USA and Hong Kong.
- Participants from all walks of life joined this event: including politicians, religious leaders, students, and general public.
- This event attracted many young people’s interest. Furthermore, it allowed our next generation to put their faith into action by sharing their gifts with us through their participation as speakers and their leadership in our technological and zoom security team.
- In today’s multicultural society, we encounter many unjust situations due to racism and discrimination. It is time for us to speak up as persons of faith so that we can work towards a more just society where everyone is treated fairly.
- At the end of this event, we recognized multiple interfaith organizations for their tremendous contributions towards the development and continuous building of Muslim and Christian relationships over the years.

Cultivating Anti-Racist Faith Communities

by Muneeb Nasir (Muslim Co-Chair, NMCLC)

Canadian Christians and Muslims recently engaged in an online dialogue on fostering inclusive and anti-racist faith communities in the country.

The forum, held on February 3rd, was the annual event of the National Muslim Christian Liaison Committee (NMCLC) to celebrate World Interfaith Harmony Week which, this year was themed, “Extending Our Embrace.”

A few hundred people from across the country, as well as a few from the U.S. and around the world, joined the zoom conversation on several social media platforms:

<https://www.facebook.com/NMCLC/videos>

or

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxduN5ecH7w>

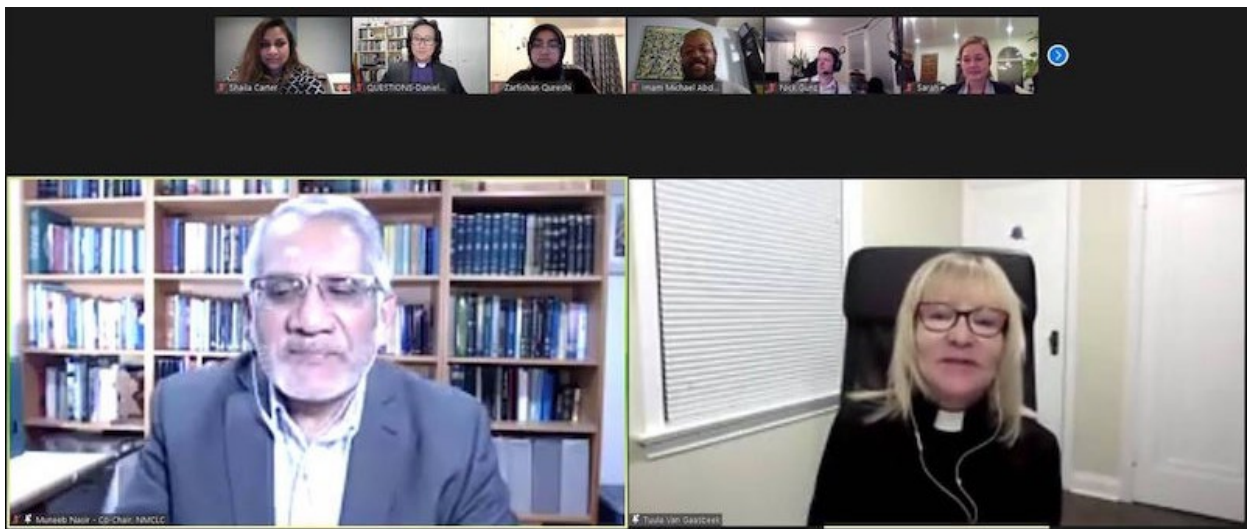
Master of Ceremonies of the event was Rev. Daniel Cho, Past Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and the panel discussion was moderated by the Most Rev. Wayne Kirkpatrick, Bishop - Roman Catholic Diocese of Antigonish. The panelists were Imam Michael Taylor, Regional Chaplain - Ontario of Correctional Service Canada; Sarah Guinta, Coordinator - Office of Justice and Peace, Roman Catholic Diocese of Hamilton; and Zarfishan Qureshi, Chaplaincy Intern - Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Toronto.





“Tonight’s virtual panel discussion is cosponsored by the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Toronto and the Intercultural Dialogue Institute-GTA Chapter,” said Reverend Tuula Van Gaasbeek, Christian Co-Chair of NMCLC, in her welcoming remarks. “This event is also part of the annual World Interfaith Harmony Week.”

“The World Interfaith Harmony Week provides a platform—one week in a year—when all interfaith groups and other groups of goodwill around the world can show what a powerful movement they are,” she added. “It is hoped that this initiative will provide a focal point from which all people of goodwill can recognize that the common values they hold far outweigh the differences they have, and thus provide a strong dosage of peace and harmony to their communities.”



Muneeb Nasir, Muslim Co-Chair of NMCLC, in his remarks spoke of the mission of the long-standing interfaith committee.

“The National Muslim Christian Liaison Committee has been in existence for over 3 decades and brings representatives of Muslim and Christian denominations and organizations in Canada into a forum for respectful dialogue on themes of common interest, and for the exchange of faith-related concerns and areas of sensitivity between Muslims and Christians.”

“Member denominations and organizations of NMCLC share a vision that Christians and Muslims realize the full potential of our relationship – that we appreciate, respect, support and understand each other – leading to the betterment of our society,” he added.



Imam Michael Taylor, in his remarks, spoke of his faith journey and the milieu in which he grew up in the Caribbean island of Barbados.

“Racism worldwide and the most difficult parts of racism is anti-Black racism. It seems that regardless of religion or race or the place you are in the world anti-Black racism is the most virulent form of this disease that possesses humans.”

He spoke of how religious believers often fail to live up to the teachings of their faith, especially around the issue of race.

“The fundamental teachings of Islam around race situates Islam as an anti-racist religion,” he said.

“However, the high expectations of my religion of Islam has somehow seemed to have escaped Muslims and the high expectations of all of our faith traditions about anti-racism seem to have proved hard for believers to live up to.”



Sarah Guinta, Coordinator of the Office of Justice and Peace at the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hamilton, proposed that faith communities engage in reflection on the issues of race and their support of systems of oppression.

“Offerings and resources that centers and amplifies Black and Indigenous voices are a way to dismantle oppression in our schools, places of work and our places of worship.”

“As a faith community offering intentional reflection and examination of conscience that touches specifically on race and complicity is one pathway to consider - for example, how do I personally benefit from systems of oppression, have I been silent in moments when I should have been vocal, have I looked at others for the unique value and gifts that they possess or have I looked for deficiencies, have I stepped outside my comfort zone to serve my community, have I helped directly without the expectation of recognition.”



Zarfishan Qureshi, a Chaplaincy Intern at Multi-Faith Centre, University of Toronto eloquently articulated that structurally racism must be addressed in our society.

“It can be damaging if we continue to talk about racism as an individual struggle as opposed to an institutional force present within our society. Failing to recognise that structural racism instilled in our communities is harmful, especially because it comes at the cost of those who experience it. It removes all responsibility from the institutions that uphold it and it places the blame on the individual experiencing racism.”

“Treating racism as a case by case occurrence builds the idea and adds to the narrative that our society is not at fault and it makes us complacent as to how racism manifests itself in our society as a whole but, at a personal level, in our own actions.”

Following the panel presentations, participants met in breakout rooms and discussed ways to strengthen the culture of mutual racial acceptance on both an individual and systemic level.

“This event was very informative, educational and well organized. Everybody had a chance to share their thoughts in the breakout rooms around the question that was given.”

*Yegana Jafarova, Azerbaijani Women’s Support Centre (AWSC)
Member of NMCLC*

“I found the event stimulating. It showed that each of the presenters had become deeply aware of how racism impacts both our Canadian society and also our faith communities.”

Dr. Jim Payton, Christian Reformed Church member of NMCLC

“Race and Religion was a searing and perceptive portrayal of how racism and colonial attitudes are deeply entrenched in our society and lurk even in our good intentions to offer charitable aid. We must be mindful of this in all our efforts to “help” people. The pervasive reality of racism was really brought home to me by the speakers. One of the speakers, Sarah Guinta, said that “It is a necessity to embrace the uncomfortable, acknowledge that comfortable is no longer acceptable, that comfortable maintains and upholds the status quo that benefits a few and oppresses many.” Nothing is going to change without this uncomfortableness.”

Kathy Murtha, Event Participant from The Mary Ward Centre

VIDEO: <https://www.facebook.com/NMCLC/videos> or <https://youtu.be/yx-duN5ecH7w>

National Muslim Christian Liaison Committee of Canada (NMCLC) is a forum for respectful dialogue on themes of common interest and for the exchange of faith-related concerns and areas of sensitivity between Muslims and Christians, through official representatives of both faiths. We seek to build long-lasting friendships and cooperation between Christians and Muslims, and to work toward a society based on values of compassion, respect and collaboration.

Contact the National Muslim Christian Liaison Committee of Canada at:

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Twitter: <https://twitter.com/NMCLC1>