



Faith, Belief and Religion

“The critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women. Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is therefore, appraised as not redemptive.”

Rosemary Radford Ruether

Faith, religion and belief are some of the most private considerations of human beings. Each person will have their own approach, even within an organised religion. Adhering to strict religious teachings can be challenging in the 21st Century. This can be exacerbated when religious leaders are seen to contravene strict religious laws for lay people, e.g. child sexual abuse scandals.

For women, practicing their faith can give great solace, particularly in challenging times. Patriarchal attitudes, misinformation and discrimination however can all negatively impact on women's religious practice. The link between religion and the state can not only cause tension for women, but also emotional distress, isolation and can even take their liberty. Essential questions such as the right to abortion can be heavily influenced by religion and can bring them into conflict with some of their deepest held beliefs. Recent changes to the law in Northern Ireland is a good example of this conflict between state, religious institutions and the individual. The impact of anti-abortion laws was devastating for women leading to;

- women experience[ing] multiple barriers to travelling for abortion services, even when abortion is provided without charge;
- self-management, often preferred over travel, but its criminalisation engender[ed] fear and isolation;
- obstruction of import of abortion medications by Northern Ireland Customs contributes to stress, anxiety, a higher risk of complications, and trial of ineffective or unsafe methods; and
- lack of clarity surrounding the obligations of healthcare professionals in Northern Ireland causes mistrust of the healthcare system.

(Aiken, A. et al (2019))

For the UK State religion plays an embedded part of changes to legislation. In the UK there are 26 seats saved in the House of Lords allocated to Bishops from the Church of England. Across the UK religious leaders are represented on School Councils, in sporting institutions and across pop culture, such as the BBC Thought for the Day. The link between the state and, in particular, the Church of England is institutional and influences many areas of our lives. For people with different or no religion, but with just as strong belief as anyone in the Church of England, this can cause tension.

Article 9 of the Human Rights Act 1998 states you have the freedom to change or practice your religion and also protects your right to have no religion at all. This article also protects your right to have beliefs which are not religious, such as pacifism. The ability to choose your religion, faith and belief and how you express these is a right every human being has. This also is enshrined in the Equality Act 2010.

It is essential that all human beings have the right to hold their own beliefs and to practice in the way they wish. To balance any tension that may arise, it is the state's responsibility to ensure that all are aware of their human right to faith, religion and belief and ensure they are still entitled to the same protections, support and services as everyone else regardless.

EVENT RESULTS

THEME: The issues of religious, faith and personal beliefs can be complex, challenging, inspiring and often confusing. This Open Space event brought women together with different faiths, religions and personal beliefs to address some of these issues in a safe and respectful environment.

PARTICIPANTS: A total of 87 women from a wide range of interested organisations and convened 24 break-out groups on issues with 73 proposed actions over two sessions. **(06/10/2011 & 28/01/2015).**

TOP FIVE PRORITIES VOTED BY PARTICIPANTS (NUMBER OF VOTES)

October 2011	January 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spend time and communicate with your children daily. 28 votes Recognising what is cultural rather than integral to essence of faith through awareness raising – for self and others. 22 votes To promote and encourage girls and young women (well all of us really!) to raise their self esteem through a positive self-image and not be pressured to conform. 15 votes Making links/partnerships with women in religion. 14 votes Separation of church and state. 13 votes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faith schools create division and should be replaced with schools promoting equality and diversity (don't know if any currently do this). 35 votes Don't make presumptions about people's religion – feel able to ask and keep an open mind. Learn and accept! 24 votes Actively promote opportunities for diverse communities to come together to open up positive dialogues. 17 votes Challenge the media!! Don't buy into racist, sexist, homophobic magazines. 16 votes Curriculum should be more balanced to reflect diversity promoting similarities not differences. 15 votes

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

October 2011	January 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal/attitude shift 162 votes Making connections 51 votes Education/Awareness raising 30 votes Campaigning/Lobbying – legislative change 25 votes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education/Training/Awareness raising 109 votes Individual action/mind-set change 67 votes Organised action 24 votes

DETAILED RESULTS FROM THE WORKING GROUPS, 10 VOTES OR ABOVE

October 2011	January 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spend time and communicate with your children daily. 28 votes Need to influence religious policy. 23 votes To promote and encourage girls and young women (well all of us really!) to raise their self esteem through a positive self-image and not be pressured to conform. 15 votes Making links/partnerships with women in religion. 14 votes False: Separation of church and state. 13 votes Withdraw financial contributions. 12 votes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faith schools create division and should be replaced with schools promoting equality and diversity (don't know if any currently do this). 35 votes Don't make presumptions about people's religion – feel able to ask and keep an open mind. Learn and accept! 24 votes Actively promote opportunities for diverse communities to come together to open up positive dialogues. 17 votes Challenge the media!! Don't buy into racist, sexist, homophobic magazines. 16 votes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual health education at all levels – dialogue and communication between partners to have a love relationship not just a sexual relationship. 11 votes • Taking individual responsibility. 11 votes • Parent – responsibility: loving guider. 11 votes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Good dialogue. ○ Seek support as you need it. ○ Self awareness with faith, confident. • Increased regulation/codes of conduct for media. 11 votes • Break the rules!! 10 votes • Women should take hold of their lives and get involved. 10 votes • To accept people in whatever situation they face. 10 votes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum should be more balanced to reflect diversity promoting similarities not differences. 15 votes • Awareness in schools. Challenge myths/stereotypes about Islam. Asking questions. Opening up discussion. 14 votes • Be the change you want to see. Support women who are speaking out and/or leading. 12 votes • Dedicate a day in the year to raise awareness about domestic abuse by preaching a sermon (all faiths). 11 votes • Training for all faith leaders. 11 votes
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