



## Message from the Editor

Dear Queen's University Member,

Welcome to the ninth issue of Equity Matters at Queen's, a bi-monthly electronic newsletter from the Queen's University Equity Office.

The theme of this issue is *"Accommodation in the Workplace."* Accommodation in the workplace plays a key role in advancing employment equity. This issue of Equity Matters provides an overview of the different accommodations that exist in the workplace at Queen's and the greater Kingston community.

In the "Equity Bits and Bites" and "Equity in the Community" sections of the newsletter, we invite readers to look at workplace accommodation through a lens of faith beliefs. The "Bits and Bites" section of the newsletter provides an overview of faith accommodation and the guidelines that the Human Rights Office is working toward and "Equity in the Community" interviews Rev. Dr. Neil Elford to discuss the new spiritual care project at Providence Care Hospital. In the "Equity in Focus" section we turn our attention to disability and the duty to accommodate.

The creation of an equitable community, one that is diverse as well as inclusive and that is respectful and protects the human rights of its members, requires the collaboration of every member of the community, including students, teaching staff, administrative staff, visitors, alumni and guests and across all of our sites and campuses. The three examples of accommodation illustrated in this edition are helping Queen's and Kingston respectively reach the goal of overcoming barriers to achieving equity in education, employment and in medical care as well as accessibility while also creating awareness and education.

Thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter. We invite you to share your comments and suggestions for future topics concerning equity at Queen's and beyond. Please contact us at [equity@queensu.ca](mailto:equity@queensu.ca). Wishing you all the best this summer!

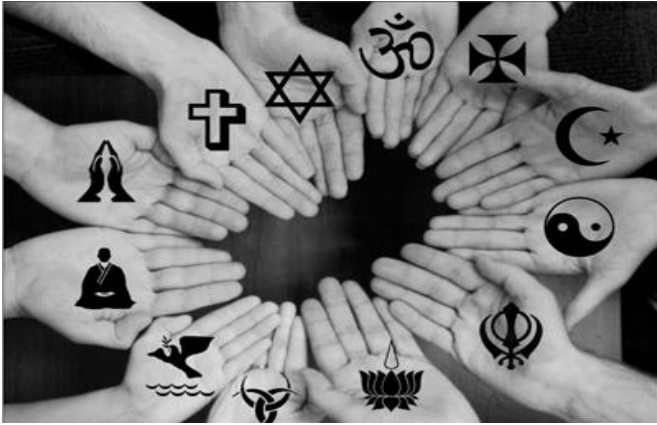
- The Equity Office at Queen's University

Employment  
Equity "Bits and  
Bites": Why  
Faith/Religious  
Accommodation?

Equity in Focus:  
Disability in the  
Workplace

Equity in the  
Community:  
Interfaith in the  
Hospital  
System

## Employment Equity “Bits and Bites”: Why Faith/Religious Accommodation?



### Background: What is faith/religious accommodation?

Mention “the duty to accommodate” and most HR professionals think of accommodating employees with disabilities. Indeed, it can be easy to forget the duty to accommodate can arise with respect to any protected ground under human rights legislation.

This edition focuses on faith/religion as a ground for accommodation. This is certainly an area that causes a lot of hand-wringing, but what can employers do in meeting and exceeding their obligations in this regard?

To begin, faith/religious accommodation normally includes the following:

- Providing alternate time off for religious holidays or time away to attend prayers
- Modifying schedules for Sabbaths and holy days
- Providing appropriate breaks and prayer rooms
- Modifying dress codes or uniforms
- Accommodating dietary restrictions by allowing menu options when food is served

These accommodations can be achieved by working alongside employees and unions and developing appropriate policies. However, if we are to move beyond mere compliance with human rights legislation, we need to consider that the workplace includes employees with various faith and spiritual beliefs.

Effective workplace management in a diverse environment includes celebrating all diversities, and religious diversity is no exception. It is more difficult to accommodate individuals if they are afraid to speak up about their religious beliefs. Many of us have our own

religious, philosophical and spiritual beliefs, even if we have little or no religious affiliation. We don’t leave our identities at home when we come to work, and our spirituality is part of who we are as individuals.

Excerpts of this article were taken from: Canadian HR Reporter

The last twenty years has seen a rapidly growing emphasis on religious and spiritual expressions in society. The trend is largely the result of growing diversity in our society – including a growth in the number of religious groups represented in Canada. Religious discrimination has become one of the fastest growing concerns in the workplace. As the requirements for observance of differing faith groups are becoming more pressing for individual observers, conflicts can arise if the workplace is unprepared.

### An Interview with the Human Rights Office

As religious accommodation becomes a growing area of concern in the workplace, Queen’s University is no different. We had a chance to sit down with **Jean Pfleiderer**, Human Rights Advisor and **Roselyn Salvador**, Researcher for the Human Rights Office, to talk about the development of a Religious Accommodation Policy for Queen’s. *“What we’re trying to do is respond to a need that we’ve perceived – the need for a uniform policy around religious observances and how to accommodate for that,”* says Pfleiderer.

With a topic so broad, the difficulty lies in what should be in scope. *“The first question we’ve been asking ourselves is: how large a policy are we trying to create? One for the Queen’s community as a whole or one that is specific only to the student body? Accommodating for religious observances on particular dates or more extensive accommodation?”* For now, Pfleiderer aims to focus on student issues and faith date accommodation.

The University has various stand-alone policies rather than one consolidated policy, but Pfleiderer wants to see that these are coordinated. *“We have done some research on what’s been done on campus and there are a number of different policies. For instance, there is a policy and procedure for requesting accommodation of various kinds for centrally administered exams. However, this doesn’t cover other scheduling of classes and tests that aren’t centrally administered. It would be helpful to students to make readily available*

information that spells out how to seek accommodation in various situations and what the deadlines are.”

Pfleiderer and Salvador have met with Queen’s Chaplain **Kate Johnson** and Associate Director of the Human Rights Office, **Stephanie Simpson** to discuss a first draft. They also plan to meet with representatives from Human Resources in order to gather information on religious accommodation policy for staff before finalizing a proposal.

Although there isn’t a single formal policy in place on faith date accommodation for students, there is a calendar to which the University subscribes, showing different religious events of various faiths throughout the year. *“If it isn’t on the calendar, however, that doesn’t mean we don’t have a responsibility to make accommodations,”* says Pfleiderer. The calendar simply serves as a starting point to help those who do scheduling be aware of some significant faith dates.

Tests and examinations and other course requirements are not the only events for which faith date accommodation may be needed. Pfleiderer: *“Significant holy days in both Islam and Judaism can occur in late August and early September in some years, just when the University schedules orientation. It has been concluded that accommodation on a case by case basis would be the best we could do in those circumstances.”*

So, why hasn’t a broader policy been in place before? *“In recent years, more questions have been raised about accommodation and we’ve also seen an increase in diversity [at Queen’s]. As a Human Rights Office, we’re trying to get ahead of the curve.”* Therefore, a policy is important because *“you’ve got to be proactive rather than reactive,”* says Salvador.

## Last Words

Pfleiderer concludes by saying, *“it’s not as though the law isn’t there; it is there, the hard part is interpreting it.”* The law requires that accommodation be provided to the point of undue hardship. There is case law to interpret, but there is no set formula that tells you exactly what to do to accommodate a particular situation and when you have arrived at undue hardship.

Too often the word *accommodation* is interpreted to suggest a burden, an obligation, and a duty. However, *accommodation* is really about removing barriers to full participation.

## Equity in the Focus: Accommodating Disability in the Workplace

Persons with disabilities constitute one of the most excluded groups from the Canadian workforce. They are subject to long periods of unemployment and are three times more likely not to take part in the labour force at all. One of the reasons persons with disabilities are excluded from work is that employers have not actively looked at ways of modifying workplaces to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities.

An employee is not required to disclose a disability. However, when an accommodation is requested, everyone involved should share appropriate information and actively seek solutions. Everyone – employers, unions, and persons with disabilities – has a shared responsibility for making the accommodation process a success.

### What is a disability?

Generally, disability includes any physical disability regardless of its cause, any intellectual disability or impairment, or a learning disability. Discrimination on the grounds of disability occurs when the disability impacts the employee’s duties at work or the employer perceives it will impact on their duties at work.

Disability can arise from a condition at birth, an illness, or an injury. Human rights do not distinguish the source. The disability can also be temporary, permanent, or recurring. The duty to accommodate remains the same. The duty is owed to all employees whether they are new employees, casual, temporary or permanent.

Excerpts of this article were taken from: *Disability Rights in the Workplace: Understanding Duty to Accommodate*

What are the basic steps that should be taken when the need for accommodation arises? What are the key ingredients of a successful accommodation process? *Lancaster House’s “Roadmap on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate,”* is an excellent resource, allowing users to walk through the basic steps in each stage of the process, including identifying the need for accommodation, gathering the necessary information, exploring the options and ultimately fulfilling the duty to accommodate. **Please see Appendix for the roadmap.**

## Equity in the Community: Interfaith Inclusion at Providence Care Hospital

Multiculturalism has a long history in Canada and is supported by a broad framework of laws. Canada was the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy, to underline the value of pluralism including the rights of Aboriginal peoples and Canada's two official languages. The policy became law in 1988, and last year (2013) marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*. The Act recognizes the diversity of Canadians – in regards to race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion – as a fundamental characteristic of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of Canada.

The Canadian demographic landscape has changed significantly since 1988. Recent data from the 2011 National Household Survey also illustrates that:

- Canada has a foreign-born population of approx. 6,775,800, representing 20.6% of total population – highest portion among G8.
- In addition to English & French, more than 200 languages were reported as mother tongue.
- Proportion of population who reported religious affiliations other than Christian – including Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist – continues to grow. In 2011, about 2,373,700 people (7.2%) reported affiliation with one of these religions, up from 4.9% of a decade earlier.

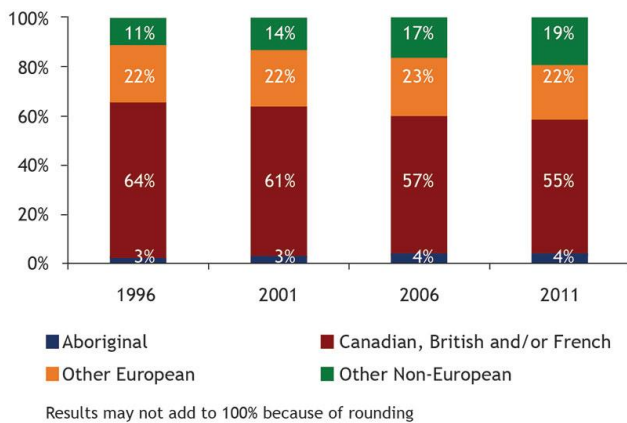


Figure 1: Percentage of the Population by Broad Ethnic Origin Reporting Categories, 1996, 2001, 2006 Censuses and 2011 National Household Survey

Excerpts of this article were taken from: 2012-2013 Annual Report on the Operation of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* As Canadian society evolves, with increasing diversity being represented, it has become that much more

important to have diversity reflected in all aspects of life in Canada, including the healthcare system. The healthcare system is one area that has recognized the need to be inclusive of all Canadians.

### Local Perspective: Spiritual Care at Providence Care



A great example of diversity in our local community is the new spiritual care project led by **Rev. Dr. Neil Elford** at the new Providence Care Hospital currently under construction. We had a chance to speak with Dr. Elford about the project.

Dr. Elford has been in healthcare since 1986. He first spent 22 years at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton, where he was the Manager for Supportive Care Services, before making the move to Kingston where he currently acts as the Director for Spiritual Health, Mission and Ethics at Providence Care. He holds a Doctor of Ministry and a Master of Divinity from Queen's University, as well as a Bachelor of Arts degree.

Dr. Elford has long been involved in healthcare ministry. From his experience, he shares the following: *"Everybody has beliefs. Some beliefs are shaped by a particular religion. Sometimes they're shaped by other influences in a person's life."* Over the last 8-10 years, he's found that many people will say, *"I practice this religion or I'm influenced by some Buddhist beliefs, Christian beliefs – a blending together in a pluralistic world."* He suggests that, *"we need abilities to support people as they use their beliefs to make choices about healthcare and come to terms with their life"* and he believes that *"religion and spirituality really shape those choices that we make and how we make meaning about what's happening to us in our lives."*

The interfaith spiritual centre at the new hospital is in part a response to the change in the Canadian demographic landscape, including Kingston, as seen in the data provided by Statistics Canada above: *"In Kingston, the primary background has been Judeo-Christian. But increasingly, with [Queen's] University, there are other faith dimensions, including a fairly large community of First Nations people living close to us. What we find with the increasing varied religious backgrounds is the need for a space to practice their*



*spiritual beliefs. With the new hospital currently under construction, we are developing three sacred spaces in which people can attend to their spiritual needs.”*

Dr. Elford stresses the importance of responding to the changing demographics. His work includes asking the people who represent various faith groups in Kingston ‘What would you need a space to be like for you to be able to carry out the religious practices that are important for you?’ Through interviewing various religious groups, he has learned that the needs are quite different and diverse. *“Some are ongoing daily rituals, prayers, ceremonies. Some are particular ceremonies towards the end of life.”* The centre isn’t just for the patients. *“But also for their families...how family members, while they’re at the hospital, can continue to practice their way of praying, or attend functions, like masses or other kinds of worship services.”*

In addition to the goal of catering to the changing demographics, Dr. Elford states, *“the goal at Providence is to care for the **whole** person – body, mind, spirit, and emotions. The spiritual part does shape how healthy we can be and that’s why we need these spaces... some are more religious, formal practices. Some are more personal spaces.”* With the help of various religious groups and the goal of caring for the whole person and families, the three sacred spaces planned are:

- 1) **Outdoor Space:** Healing garden.
- 2) **Indoor Space:** Larger worship centre for services/masses.
- 3) **Meditation Room:** Smaller, more private room where people can orient themselves in whatever direction they need to.

The key word to this story is *“interfaith, meaning ‘between faith groups,’”* says Dr. Elford. *“We don’t see ourselves to be of a certain type. But, whatever your beliefs are, you are able to practice them. [Accordingly], the spaces will be conducive to all beliefs.”*

And that, Dr. Elford believes, is the importance and reason of having interfaith represented at a healthcare centre. This invariably raises the question of the potential for tension in an interfaith model. Dr. Elford states that Providence Care wants to be respectful. People would be encouraged to bring what is uniquely for them. *“When they need to bring in specific and unique symbols and rituals, they can do that. Bring who you are and how you believe because in your heart, what you believe will help you come to terms with living*

*or dying. So, we want people to be able to feel that level of comfort.”*

Dr. Elford says he knows this, *“having worked with lots of different faiths, 12 different religions in Edmonton, including a lot of time with First Nations.”* He states it was tough at first because he was trying to cater to each faith group and change who he was. For example, *“with Buddhist groups he tried to be more Buddhist like,”* but one of the groups he was working with saw this and politely said to him, *“Neil, we are all here to be the very best of who we are, so be the very best Christian you can be.”* It is here that he learned the ultimate pursuit was, *“to respect that each of us are seeking our own ways, our own spiritual paths. It’s not about creating one spiritual path. It’s about respecting diversity.”*

For a greater understanding of the strength that diversity brings, Dr. Elford recommends Peter Knudtson and David Suzuki’s Wisdom of the Elders that uses ecology as a powerful metaphor for the need for diversity in our own society. *“We see the greatest strengths in ecological systems with the animals and plants. The more diversity in ecological system, the more robust and healthy it will be.”* In the same way, *“**the more diverse beliefs, cultures and practices [in our society], the stronger we will be.”***

This is the greatest lesson he wants to emphasize and hopes it is one that will resonate. *“I found this very helpful, seeing myself as a person to help people come together with respect for each other. It’s not about competing with each other, but rather respecting each other in our own ways and supporting each other.”*

**What words of encouragement does Dr. Elford have for Queen’s in its endeavor to ensure an interfaith perspective in both the academic and social climate?**

*“There are two ways. First, to support the interfaith Chaplain at Queen’s and see the Office of the Chaplain as an opportunity to support people in whatever beliefs they have. The second concerns the deep value in the academic world of ‘freedom of thought.’ That is also an important value around spiritual practices. Queen’s can honour that by creating spaces for freedom of expression because spaces tell you whether a particular endeavour is respected or not.”*

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Appendix: Lancaster’s Roadmap on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate in Canada

