

NAVIGATING *Religious Diversity* IN THE WORKPLACE

CONFERENCE BOARD
OF CANADA

RELIGION'S DIVERSITY DIMENSION

CANADA'S DIVERSITY REVEALS ITSELF TO US AS CITIZENS in our daily lives as we meet each other in the workplace, the school and university, our public institutions, and even in our own families. Our country's largest city, Toronto, is considered to be the world's most diverse city, home to a plethora of different nationalities, ethnicities, and religious affiliations.

Canadians, like humanity the world over, confront questions on a daily basis that call us to reflect on who we are and who we are called to be, in our inner selves, in relationship with others, and in our metaphysical need to make sense of the world around us. However, in the increasingly dominant discussion on diversity, religion, and the public expression of religion, is too often sidelined. Most stories about religion presume a narrative of decline. Assertions are often made that church attendance is on the way down, religious influence is waning, and while it is occasionally inconvenient, it is for the most part irrelevant to our shared life as Canadians.

This narrative doesn't sit well within the global or domestic context. To put things into perspective, a 2015 global study published in Demographic Research and its connected Pew Research Center report show that between 2010 and 2050, the growth of religious populations worldwide is projected to be twenty-three times larger than the growth of religiously unaffiliated populations.

During this period, the number of people affiliated with a religion is expected to grow by 2.3 billion, from 5.8 billion in 2010 to 8.1 billion in 2050. By contrast, the number of people unaffiliated with any religion (including those who say their religion is "nothing in particular" as well as self-identifying agnostics and atheists) is projected to increase by only 0.1 billion, from 1.13 billion in 2010 to 1.23 billion in 2050.

According to the most recent census data of 2011, Christians nominally represent 67.3 percent of the country's population, and are followed by people having no religion making up 23.9 percent of the total population. Other faiths include Muslims (3.2 percent), Hindus (1.5 percent), Sikhs (1.4 percent), Buddhists (1.1 percent), and Jews (1.0 percent). In recent years there has been a substantial rise in the number of adherents of non-Christian religions in Canada. From 1991 to 2011, Islam grew by 316 percent, Hinduism 217 percent, Sikhism 209 percent, and Buddhism by 124 percent, albeit from very small bases.

Furthermore, Cardus, in partnership with Angus Reid, found that, broadly speaking, Canadians fall into four mindsets on religion: non-believers (19 percent), the spiritually uncertain (30 percent), the privately faithful (30 percent), and the religiously committed (21 percent).

Altogether—if you look at Canadian society as a whole—a staggering 80 percent have a connection to spirituality—from being religiously committed to open to spirituality.

MANAGING NEW REALITIES

RESPONDING TO INCREASING RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY as a reality in the workplace through accommodation up to undue hardship is not merely a legal obligation. Numerous studies show that the most successful businesses encourage an environment in which employees can bring their "full self" to work. It also provides new opportunities for engaging in corporate social responsibility efforts.

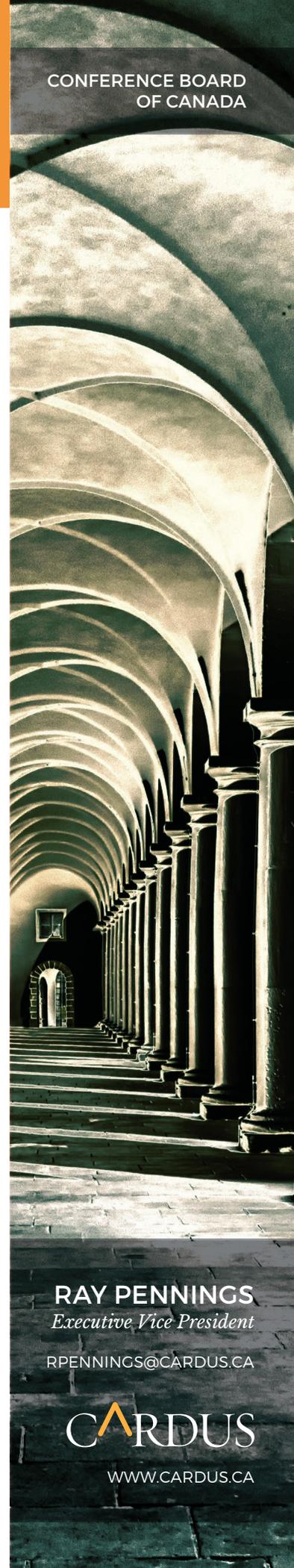
Navigating religion in work environments can be a complex and daunting task—which is why Cardus has proposed a four-part framework for managing religious diversity.

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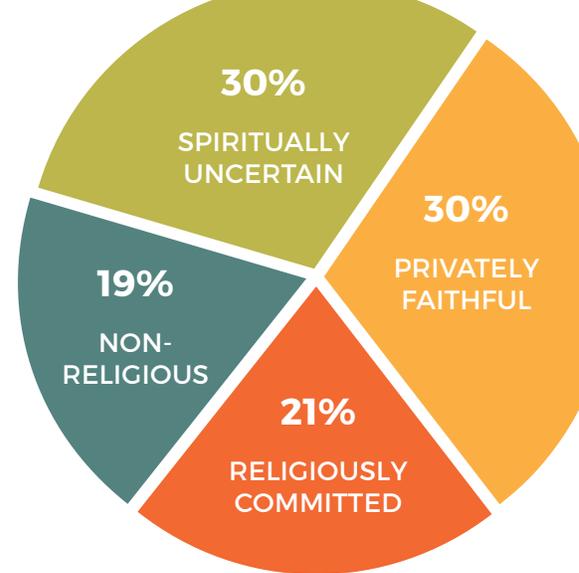
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1. Awareness: Build religious literacy and awareness within your organization.

- A. What is the leadership hierarchy, if any, in this tradition?
- B. What are the texts used by members of this tradition?
- C. How do people access the divine in this tradition?
- D. What are the essential rituals, ceremonies, or activities in this tradition?
- E. What are the major tenets or beliefs that set this tradition apart from others?
- F. What norms, rules, and taboos exist in this tradition?
- G. How are men, women, and relationships viewed in this tradition?



Canadians' midset on religion, 2017

2. Affirmation: Institutionally recognize the importance of religious diversity and religious freedom in the workplace—just as other aspects of individual identities are being publicly affirmed, so too should religious identities.

- A. Affirm that religious freedom is a fundamental right, for example, by taking the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation's Corporate Pledge.
- B. Strive to be a leader in promoting and protecting religious freedom in its workplace and communities.
- C. Speak up! Don't tolerate abuses of religious freedom within your sphere of influence.

3. Engagement: Look outside your organization to learn and work with religious communities.

- A. Partner with local religious and charitable organizations to host panel discussions—possibly develop a religious perspectives panel that brings in speakers from your community to talk about their faith and experiences within their tradition.
- B. Host training sessions with organizations like the Religious Freedom Forum.
- C. Address tokenism in the workplace and surface-level initiatives to promote deep pluralism.

4. Accommodation: Complex issues require complex solutions—not surface-level treatment.

- A. Allow scheduling changes/voluntary substitutes/swap shifts if the schedule conflicts with religious holidays and observance.
- B. Allow the employee to change duties/lateral transfer if the task conflicts with religious convictions.
- C. Make exceptions for religious garb/symbols in the workplace.
- D. Allow the use of work facilities for religious observance.
- E. Welcome religious expression in the workplace.

