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La Leche League is a nonprofit, non-governmental, and non-sectarian organization. How often have you read that or written it as an introduction about LLL in something such as a funding application? And how often have you heard and read that Leaders don't mix causes, but focus only on breastfeeding? The mixing causes statement can be found in Cooperative Action—Guidelines for Leaders, Appendix 10 of the LLLI Policies and Standing Rules.

The 10 concepts of La Leche League philosophy cement us together. However, contrary to what some people have come to believe, attachment parenting, co-sleeping, tandem nursing, or even insisting that toddlers have to be allowed to wean naturally without also allowing the mother to have some say in whether her baby has outgrown the need, are not part of these concepts. Rather, they are options for parenting that some parents may choose, while others may not.

Home birth, home schooling, vegetarianism, alternative medications—all these may be acceptable as topics to discuss at workshops and Conferences as long as they are only part of a wider discussion looking at other types of birth, schooling, nutrition, and health. On their own, they are clearly part of mixing causes.

Issues such as abortion, vaccination, and circumcision are not only mixing causes but are also hot topics—ones that would serve to divide us rather than bind us together. Within La Leche League are those who have strong beliefs on both sides of these issues, but that doesn't stop us all from believing in mothering through breastfeeding. Parents who want to meet and gather with like-minded parents on issues other than breastfeeding or mothering through breastfeeding have the option of also joining one of the many organizations that address these beliefs and interests. LLL doesn't have to be a Leader's only interest!

The most obvious examples of mixing causes are talking about political and religious beliefs. Such subjects can be dangerous conversational topics for the dinner table as well as at LLL meetings, workshops, or Conferences. Within LLL New Zealand are Leaders who vote Labour National, Green, Alliance, ACT, and some who don't vote at all. This doesn't matter because we don't discuss politics!

And then there is religion. La Leche League is a nonsectarian organization—how else could it function as an international organization, serving women who have many different belief systems? Nonsectarian doesn't just mean that LLL is not aligned to any particular sect of the Christian faith. It means that it is not affiliated with any church, religion, or belief system. LLL is neutral on all matters of religious belief (or non-belief). Why? Because breastfeeding and helping mothers worldwide to breastfeed are the focus of our work as LLL Leaders. We want to reach out to mothers of all faiths, races, and cultures. To hear about breastfeeding being linked to religion of any kind would only serve to alienate or offend some of those we wish to reach.

In Series or other meetings and in counseling calls, Leaders know not to mix causes. A likely place for religious views to enter discussions is on discipline. If this happens, Leaders simply state that LLL is nonsectarian and that we don't enter into religious discussions at an LLL meeting or gathering. Workshop and Conference programs also need to comply with La Leche League philosophy and with the policy of not mixing causes. Regarding religious content in publications, there is a policy in the LLLI Policies and Standing Rules, Publications, Religious Content, which reads:

LLL Publications will not accept materials (stories, poems, etc.) that are primarily and specifically religious. LLL materials for publication must reflect the policy of not mixing causes. Publication of material wherein the author's personal faith is an integral part will depend on

successful editorial discretion that enables the author's feelings to be seen without permitting religious philosophy to be obtrusive or to overshadow other aspects of the material that are suitable for LLL publications.

Editorial matter, i.e., material written by the editor or anyone writing in an official LLL capacity, must reflect the LLLI policy of not mixing causes.

"Why is it a big deal?" you may ask, also saying, "I'm not religious, but I'm also not alienated or offended if articles or discussions mention religion."

Maybe not, but in New Zealand, most of those who check "No religion" on the Census nevertheless come from a heritage and culture based on 2,000 years of Christianity. It is sometimes difficult to separate culture from religion. For example, it is entirely possible today to celebrate Christmas and Easter without any reference to the Christian origins of either. But what if you had a different faith and a different heritage? Would you feel alienated from LLL if a Leader or publication linked Christianity to breastfeeding? And what if the presenter/author were of a non-Christian heritage and you were Christian? Would you feel upset at the link made between breastfeeding and that particular religion?

Unless you are a close personal friend of mine, you won't know how I vote, whether I go to church, whether I had my children vaccinated, had a home birth, home-schooled, practice alternative medicine, or any other facts about me that don't relate to LLL philosophy and to breastfeeding. Nor do I need to know that about any of you because all of this is irrelevant to our work as La Leche League Leaders. And if we, as Leaders, want to speak to women of all faiths, cultures, race, politics, and personal beliefs that don't have anything to do with breastfeeding, then we must be careful not to mix causes as LLL Leaders.

Breastfeeding brings us together; Mothering through breastfeeding cements us; Other issues can only serve to divide us.