



Church bodies bury long-running dispute

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MEDIATION and handshakes have ended a five-year racial vilification battle between an evangelical Christian group and a Victorian Muslim body.

The Catch The Fire Ministries sparked a row with the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) in 2002 when it claimed in a newsletter that Muslims were demons training to make Australia an Islamic state, that the Koran promoted violence and killing and that Muslims derived money from drugs.

Catch the Fire pastor Daniel Nalliah said he was relieved the long-running case, which was settled in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) after a hearing in the Victorian Court of Appeal, was now over.

"No-one expected it to be so prolonged," Pastor Nalliah said.

He said the two parties were able to resolve the matter after seven hours of mediation last Friday.

"On the same day, my wife Maryse delivered a baby girl so I had had just two hours sleep before mediation," Pastor Nalliah said.

"We found ourselves in a very friendly environment talking about the baby.

"The mediation brought two communities to a closer relationship - there was a lot of goodwill and a lot of shaking of hands."

In a joint statement the ICV, Pastor Nalliah and Pastor Daniel Scot, who aired the offending comments at a seminar, said they recognised the rights of all to express their own religious beliefs, while also recognising everyone's dignity and worth.

It was the first case to be heard by VCAT under Victoria's 2002 Racial and Religious Tolerance Act.

Former ICV president Yasser Soliman said he welcomed Pastor Nalliah's comments and hoped the two communities could move forward together.

"It's most important for people in this day and age to be talking directly to each other rather than talking about each other," Mr Soliman said.

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