

**CHURCH OF ENGLAND
MISSION AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL**

**Guidelines on
civic services / events involving people of different faiths
rev 4**

These guidelines are designed specifically to address the Church of England's role in relation to civic services and events involving people of different religions. Guidelines on the wider questions of 'Multi-Faith Worship' were issued by the House of Bishops in 1993, following the 1992 Board of Mission report on that subject. That report included an extended discussion of the theological and practical issues involved¹.

Contents

- A Planning a civic service or event**
- B Multi-faith civic events in secular venues**
- C Christian worship involving people of other religions**
- D Services or events held in Church of England churches**
- E Invitations to services or events held in Church of England churches**
- F Other Church of England services involving people of different religions**

A Planning a civic service or event

1. In the diverse communities served by the Church of England, it is not uncommon for local authorities or other public or community groups to seek to celebrate or commend their work through organising services or events involving people of different religions. Church of England clergy and parishes will generally wish to engage positively with such proposals, but they will also need to make clear the theological, liturgical and legal parameters within which they work. Particularly important are questions relating to venue, format, and participation. The guidelines presented here set out general principles relating to these issues, but cannot address detailed situations. It is imperative that ample time is allowed for the planning of such events, and that the direction of the bishop is sought in any case of uncertainty. The bishop's good will should in any case be sought for involvement in any service or event of this kind.
2. When approached by national or local authorities or other organisations wishing to organise a civic service or event, clergy should try to explain that a number of different models are possible. Many people of all religions may be uncomfortable with the idea of worshipping together; a social or educational event may be more appropriate as a way of bringing people together. Another pattern with much to commend it is that of a series of official visits to different places of worship where

¹ http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/pdf_lib/40_questionsandsuggestions.pdf

civic guests and those of other religions can be present at the usual worship of a religious community.

3. It is important that clergy and others invited to take part should be clear from the beginning as to who carries overall responsibility for the planning, funding and delivery of civic services or events involving people of different religions. Where this role belongs to a national organisation, local authority or community group, clergy should be prepared to offer advice and practical support, but they should also be clear about the extent of their responsibility for planning and for decision making.
4. If a civic event is envisaged involving representatives of a number of different religious communities on a basis of parity, it is usually appropriate for this to be held in a secular venue equally acceptable to all. *Guidelines for such events are set out in Section B.*
5. Where a civic service is planned to take place in a Church of England church, it must be recognisably an act of Christian worship. The parish priest should take the lead role in planning the service together with key ecumenical colleagues. *Guidelines for such services are set out in Section C.*
6. Any event taking place in a Church of England church, whether it is a service or not, is subject to ecclesiastical law. *Guidelines for services and other events held in Church of England churches are set out in Section D.*
7. At any service or event in a Church of England church, the parish priest should ensure that he or she maintains control over the list of those officially invited to be present or to participate in a representative role. *Guidelines for appropriate invitations are set out in Section E.*
8. People of other religions may also be present in a representative capacity at various other kinds of services in Church of England churches which cannot be described as civic services in the strict sense. *Some suggestions as to these situations are to be found in Section F.*

B *Multi-faith civic events in secular venues*

9. Clergy or other official representatives of the Church of England should ensure that their participation in multi-faith events is such as to allow them to express the integrity of their Christian faith. They must not take part in anything that could be reasonably seen as implying assent to doctrines inconsistent with those of the Christian Church in general, or the Church of England in particular. Clergy should seek their bishop's goodwill in advance for participation in a multi-faith event.
10. Church of England clergy or others involved in the planning of multi-faith events should make a serious effort to ensure that representation from the Christian community is appropriately ecumenical in its scope.
11. Christian contributions to multi-faith events should be such as to affirm what all present hold in common, without glossing over differences. It is not appropriate to

offer material which would cause gratuitous offence or unnecessary difficulties for people of other religions, but a clearly Christian perspective should be expressed.

12. It should be made clear that there is a difference between, on the one hand, being present and attentive while prayer is offered from any religion, and on the other hand, participating in or assenting to that prayer. Where representatives of a number of different religions offer prayer, this should in each case be done in a way which is authentic to their own respective traditions. If prayer is made by Church of England clergy or others as representatives of the Christian community, this should normally be offered in the name of Jesus.
13. If it is suggested that common acts of prayer, or joint affirmations, be made by all present, great care should be taken to ensure that these are neither syncretistic nor platitudinous. It is imperative that those taking part in such events should see texts in advance, and they should be satisfied that they can take part in them with integrity. They should also reflect, and if necessary seek advice, on how such common acts will be perceived within the wider church and community. Shared silence may be more effective than any verbal formulae in expressing a sense of being together as people of different religions.
14. It may be good to explain to organisers that it is not necessary for a representative of every religious group known in the community to be invited to make a contribution. Where there is a credible local inter faith or multi-faith group, representatives of its participating groups should be invited, particularly those with national organisations in membership of the Inter Faith Network for the UK – viz., the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian communities.
15. The Church of England has a policy regarding engagement with New Religious Movements and alternative spiritualities². In particular this policy distinguishes between formal and informal forms of engagement and advises against accepting formal invitations. Because some groups are known to exploit occasions where Church of England clergy or other Christians accept invitations to events, it is advised that where it is known that members of New Religious Movements are instigating or are included as guests at a civic event, that Christians make themselves aware of the policy available on the Church of England website³ or check with the National Adviser⁴.

C Christian worship involving people of other religions

16. It is good practice to give a special place of recognition at Christian civic services to leaders or representatives of other religions within the community.
17. Representatives of other religions should be treated as honoured guests, with seating reserved for them in a prominent place, and where appropriate they should be invited to enter in procession. It is helpful if a member of the church is given the specific responsibility of welcoming and accompanying them. Appropriate

² Any religious body beyond those covered by the religions listed in paragraph 14 above

³ <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/newreligious/>

⁴ Dr Anne Richards@c-of-e.org.uk

hospitality should be provided for them after the service, with food to meet different dietary requirements clearly labelled and kept separate.

18. The content of the service should be explained to members of other religions, and clear guidance given as to what is and what is not expected of them in terms of posture, vesture and participation.
19. Care should be taken to ensure that members of other religions are not expected to behave in ways incompatible with or inappropriate to their own beliefs – for example, through being themselves asked to join in credal affirmations or to sing Christological or Trinitarian hymns.
20. In case of a celebration of the Eucharist, it should courteously be explained to members of other religions that they will not be receiving Holy Communion.
21. Sensitivity should be exercised in choosing suitable liturgical material which does not cause gratuitous offence or unnecessary difficulties for guests from other religions, but this must not mean the removal of all distinctively Christian references. Crosses or other Christian symbols should not be removed or covered.
22. It is entirely appropriate to invite representatives of other religions to join publicly in simple liturgical actions (such as lighting candles or exchanging greetings) within an overall Christian liturgical framework, providing that they are themselves comfortable with such a role.
23. It may be appropriate as part of a Christian service to invite personal reflections from members of the community who belong to other religions. If they do contribute in this way, it should be made clear that they are speaking as citizens informed by their religious beliefs and values, rather than as representatives of another religion as such.
24. It should always be remembered that Christian worship is the local expression of an international community of faith; those conducting civic services involving people of other religions should have a particular concern for the ways in which they may be reported to, and perceived by, Christians overseas.

D Services or events held in Church of England churches

25. Any services or events held in a Church of England church are subject to canon law. Services must satisfy the requirements that they ‘in words and order are reverent and seemly and are neither contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England’ [B5]. Other events held in churches should be ‘such as befit the House of God, are consonant with sound doctrine, and make for the edifying of the people’ [F16]. In case of doubt, direction should be sought from the bishop.
26. Consecrated Church of England buildings are set apart for ever for the worship of Almighty God and such worship is governed by the laws and customs of the Church of England. Civic services including active participatory roles for

representatives of other religions should be so planned as to ensure that the integrity of the whole service as an act of Christian worship is clearly preserved.

27. If representatives of other religions are invited to read during the service from their scriptures, it is of the utmost importance that the texts to be used should be agreed beforehand with the parish priest. Good quality English translations should always be made available.
28. No reading or other contribution from any participant should include any element hostile or contrary to the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it.
29. It is not appropriate for a member of another religion at a civic service in a Church of England church to lead the congregation in prayer or to read Biblical texts .
30. It is not generally appropriate for a representative of another religion to preach at a civic service in a Church of England church, though a person belonging to another religion might be invited to offer reflections from a community perspective.

E Invitations to services or events held in Church of England churches

31. A serious effort should be made to ensure that representation from the Christian community is ecumenical in its scope, and that Christians of different traditions play an active part in a civic service.
32. It is not necessary for a representative of every religious group known in the community to be invited to make a contribution to a civic service or event. Where there is a credible local inter faith or multi-faith group with Church of England participation, representatives of all participating groups should be invited to be present, subject to the following points.
33. Official invitations to civic services or events should in general be confined to representatives of those religions with national organisations in membership of the Inter Faith Network for the UK – viz., the Baha’i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian communities.
34. Those organising civic services or events should be aware of problems which may arise if representatives of groups not generally seen as mainstream in a given religion (for example, Ahmadiyya Muslims or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) are officially invited to attend or to participate.
35. Invitations to attend as guests, or to participate in, civic services in Church of England churches should not be extended to representatives of New Religious Movements, of pagan groups, of the Church of Scientology, or of secularist and humanist organisations. Members of such groups, like people of any religion or none, are to be welcomed as individuals at services or events in churches.

F Other Church of England services involving people of different religions

36. Guests from different religions may be invited in a representative capacity to various other services in the life of the Church of England – for example, the inauguration of a new ministry, the dedication of a new place of Christian worship, or the celebration of a significant event in the life of the Christian community. The general guidelines in Sections C, D and E will apply in these cases also.
37. People from different religions may also sometimes be invited to churches to help the Christian community be enriched in their understanding of different beliefs and values; it is likely that this will involve the visitors in sharing with the congregation items from the scriptures or liturgies of their religions. Careful preparatory work should precede such occasions, and their educational nature should be made clear.

In case of questions over the interpretation or application of these guidelines, in relation to any service or event, direction should be sought from the bishop. The bishop's goodwill should be sought at an early stage for clergy involvement in any service or event involving people of different religions in a representative capacity.

For further information on this or related concerns please visit the Presence and Engagement Website at www.presenceandengagement.org.uk or contact the Church of England's national Inter Religious Affairs Adviser at guy.wilkinson@c-of-e.org.uk