

The Diocese of Manchester

Faith to Faith: A Gospel Project

The Church and other Faith Communities: Basic Principles

**Why we need to develop our involvement
with other faith communities**

- **The peace of the world** is no longer a matter of good relations between nations, but also of harmony between its great faiths. This is the great new fact of the 21st century. It involves every Christian.
- **Our relationship with other faith communities is at a critical point.** Violence nationally and internationally has resulted in widespread mistrust and recrimination, so that many communities in our diocese have become racially and economically segregated. The gravity of the situation is impossible to overestimate.
- **World peace and peace in our local communities depend on what we do next.** How is our church to respond? How can we best work with those of other faiths to recognise a God-given imperative to restore hope and trust?
- **The credibility and integrity of Faith itself is at stake:** faith communities need to be persuaded that they have little alternative but to enter into a new, creative phase of relationship building.
- **As the established church we have a key role** in creating good relationships between the faith communities in our diocese. Most sections of society, including central and local government, are looking to us to take a lead. Not to do so would be a theological and pastoral dereliction of duty. If we fail to grasp the opportunity the reputation of the Church will be damaged and the situation made worse.
- **The present situation is a *Kairos* moment,** a God-given moment of opportunity. How do we seize it? How can the situation be redeemed?

**We commit ourselves to pray and work together,
guided by five basic principles.**

1. ***We acknowledge those prophetic concerns and ethical aspirations which the Church shares with many other faith communities.***
 - Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life
 - Commitment to a just economic and political order
 - Commitment to tolerance and truthfulness
 - Commitment to equal rights and partnership between men and women.

2. *We acknowledge that sharing, learning and potential partnership with others does not mean forsaking a Christian identity or distinctiveness.*

Trust and dialogue require on integrity of belief and the maturity to agree or disagree. In particular we need to be confident in the following:

- Praying and working for the Kingdom of God as taught by Jesus.
- Understanding that in dialogue our partners from other faiths expect us to be true to our convictions though, when sharing them, being equally willing to listen.
- It is through crisis and dialogue with others that God educates his Church.¹

3. *We acknowledge that, because grass-roots communication and practical co-operation between world faiths is still largely unexplored territory, an act of faith is required on everyone's part.*

- Such acts of faith often begin with small steps in the local area. We look for grassroots initiatives to develop from the bottom-up rather than to impose top-down solutions. Such initiatives would include mapping, learning, visiting, and, as appropriate supporting and trusting - and wherever possible by Christians working together ecumenically.
- It is for local congregations to act where they are. Local initiatives will vary but it is only through working alongside members of other religions and ethnic groups in task-oriented projects that anything worthwhile will happen.
- Changes in practice lead to changes in attitude. Getting together, working together, sharing resources and even power, forming joint committees for tackling specific problems, launching local initiatives – such things create trust, just as they create leaders and renew belief and faith.
- If the Church is to be true to its vocation, then our response to the greatest challenge of our time must be both national and parochial, that is local, the latter being the primary focus of dialogue in our diocese.
- Without real, serious dialogue between Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs and others, social harmony in Britain will prove impossible. Isolationism is not a justifiable option.

4. *We acknowledge that to be authentic we cannot think 'local' without thinking 'global'.*

- The global affects the local in that tensions between ethnic groups and religions in other parts of the world cause tension in British towns and cities.
- When jobs are lost in our locality it is sometimes because a manufacturing base has opened up somewhere else in the world.
- Local factors on the other side of the world cause people to migrate and take up economic opportunities elsewhere – sometimes in Greater Manchester – creating a new mix of cultures, languages, customs and religion.
- Both globally and locally, poverty and injustice are spiritual and moral issues before they are political.
- When we tackle issues successfully in the local area we create a basis the same problems to be tackled globally.

¹ For example, the purifying of doctrine and liturgy from the ancient 'Theology of Contempt,' could not have come about without dialogue between Christians and Jews following the Holocaust.

5. *We acknowledge the need to work together as Christians on developing a theology of the Church's mission.*

We must explore together a theology of mission and evangelism based on both *partnership and witness*. The mission of the Church is to live out the Good News that redemption is possible, not in the abstract but in the particular, and especially in the way we relate to other faiths. As we seek the renewal of both our theology and our spirituality we move more securely towards the time when we can further the peace, safety and economic wellbeing of all who live in our communities. Together we seek

- respect and tolerance alongside a sensitive witness to what we hold important.
- to define aims and objectives together.
- an openness to other faiths, with the realisation that they can teach us something.
- cultural sensitivity and self-criticism in working with others.
- honest debate and an acceptance of difference.
- a willingness to confront aggressive or power-seeking behaviour, and the development of more inclusive and participatory approaches/attitudes.

If the church is to be renewed in the Gospel and in its ministry, then the lesson of its history is that this only comes about when it responds to the problems God lays upon its conscience.

Show and Tell