

A Journey Together

A RESOURCE FOR
CHRISTIAN MUSLIM
DIALOGUE



Researched and compiled
by Gerard Forde MA

A Journey Together

Muslims and Christians in Ireland: building mutual respect, understanding and cooperation

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case they invite
the poor, the
have no means to

him, "Blessed is
he said to him,
large number of
to say to those
But all alike
and must go
ht five yoke of
Yet another

householder, in
s of the town
Sir," said the
Then the
s' and press
not one of

he found it, would he not joyfully take it on his shoulder and then, when he is
home, call together his friends and neighbours saying to them, "Rejoice with me,
I have found my sheep that was lost." In the same way, I tell you, there will be
more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner repenting than over ninety-nine
people who have no need of repentance.

The lost drachma

Or again, what woman with ten drachmas would not, if she lost one, light a lamp
and sweep out the house and search thoroughly till she found it? And then, when
she had found it, call together her friends and neighbours, saying to them, "Rejoice
with me, I have found the drachma I lost." In the same way, I tell you, there will be
rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner.

The lost son (the 'prodigal') and the dutiful son

Then he said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger (the said) son
said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that will come to me." So the

14 a. he son, var. 'his donkey'

b. In the scrolls of Qumran, the lame and the blind and cripples are excluded from the eschatological banquet of the banquet which follows it.

c. After the 'streets and alleys of the towns' of v. 22, the 'one man and his donkey' of v. 23 seem to be outside the town. There appear to be two different categories: one on one hand the poor and 'useless' of Israel, on the other the gentiles. The 'compulsion' employed in bringing the underprivileged is meant to express only the triumph of grace over their lack of preparation, not their exclusion.

to their conversion, but the absence of such 'compulsion' enters in the course of history and into the new world.

d. Hebr. 'son of man', but he, son, son of man, detachment now, cf. v. 27-28.

e. 'wife', peculiar to Lk. according to the Greek text, cf. v. 27-28.

f. Applicable to all disciples: a word to the disciples, cf. v. 27-28.

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The Muslim Christian Dialogue Project from which this resource has come was one strand of the wider Cork City Integration Project co-financed through the European Integration Fund and supported by the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration in the Department of Justice and Equality and POBAL.



The world has become a global village where happenings in one part of the world have their bearing on the rest of the world. Therefore the need to foster positive understanding and interaction among all religions has increased manifold, especially in view of the peculiar nature of threats posed to global order and peace.

In the past the Mughal emperor Akbar the Great tried to bring Muslims and Hindus together by contriving his own divine religion (Din-e-Ilahi). This philosophy of amalgamating “Raheem” (Muslim God) and “Ram” (Hindu God) could not succeed. The reason for this failure was its unrealistic approach in which the identities of both religions were eliminated by the imposition of a uniform religious structure.

This resource explains that there is no need to eliminate differences in order to construct a good society. It also emphasises the need to respect and understand the beliefs of others. These form the basis on which believers of different religions can live together. The followers of different religions and faiths need to join in opening the doors of dialogue and interaction in order to live peacefully and to eliminate terrorism and extremism.

Islam and Christianity are the two largest religions and Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world’s population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world.

This publication is an effective resource aimed at Muslims and Christians living in Ireland that not only in detail explains the importance of interfaith dialogue but also the most effective and practical approach to it. What makes this publication unique is that it is the result of a two-year project in which many meetings between Muslims and Christians took place around Ireland.

I congratulate Gerard Forde for compiling this resource and am confident that it will not only result in better understanding and interaction between Muslims and Christians in Ireland, but also around the World.

Shaykh Umar Al-Qadri

PRESIDENT & IMAM AL-MUSTAFA ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL CULTURAL CENTRE IRELAND

During the last fifty years Interfaith Dialogue has been recognised as an integral part of the life of the Church as well as an important aspect of human life in our globalised world. This has led to the establishment of interfaith commissions, international meetings, academic, humanitarian and spiritual initiatives all aimed at creating greater understanding and cooperation between people of different faiths.

In recent decades dialogue between Muslims and Christians has become an imperative needed to counter a growing polarity created by the course of world events. Dialogue is a necessity, needed to counter extremism and to promote the justice and peace that befits our common faith in one God who is Lord of all humankind and of all creation.

Here in Ireland, the existence of a mixed Muslim and Christian population is a relatively new and so far harmonious experience. Dialogue is needed to maintain and to promote the understanding, cooperation and mutual respect needed for us to live together. As it says elsewhere in this text “Dialogue is living our faith in the presence of people of other faiths. It is a means of loving neighbours who are not of my faith by reaching out to them in a spirit of openness and tolerance.”

This resource, especially with its firm focus on the ordinary everyday interaction between Muslims and Christians, is a welcome contribution to the promotion of mutual understanding, respect and cooperation between Muslims and Christians in Ireland.

Dialogue is not an easy task. There can be misunderstandings and disagreements. This resource will help avoid some of these. What dialogue is and what it seeks to achieve are clearly explained. Practical information on how to engage in it is provided. Hopefully these pages will guide many to discover that dialogue can also lead to moments when different faith traditions allow us to see the light of God that shines in so many places.

We congratulate Cois Tine and all who contributed to the meetings of Muslims and Christians that led to the development of this useful resource. We hope it will help Muslims and Christians to be good neighbours.

The Most Reverend John Buckley
ROMAN CATHOLIC BISHOP OF CORK AND ROSS

The Right Reverend Paul Colton
CHURCH OF IRELAND BISHOP OF CORK, CLOYNE & ROSS

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Introduction

This publication is aimed at Muslims and Christians living in Ireland. It is meant as a resource that will help us understand, respect and cooperate with each other as neighbours, work colleagues and friends. It is the result of a two year project during which many meetings between Muslims and Christians took place at various locations around Ireland. At these meetings one point highlighted repeatedly was the fact that most Irish people know very little about Muslims or Islam the faith they profess. In response a brief overview of Islam was prepared and may be accessed on-line at <http://www.coistine.ie/dialogue> – this aims to provide readers with a basic understanding of Islam. For Muslims, the book ‘Christianity the Complete Guide’ (Edited by John Bowden and published by Continuum, 2005) provides an encyclopaedic overview of Christianity.

Interaction and dialogue between Muslims and Christians dates back to the beginnings of Islam in the seventh century. Both religions trace their roots back to the patriarch Ibrahim/Abraham and share belief in one God (monotheism). The fourteen centuries of shared history between Muslims and Christians has been marked by periods of violence and hostility as well as times of tolerance, cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

Organised interreligious dialogue only began in the 1950’s when the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Vatican held meetings with representatives of other faiths. In the 1960’s the Second Vatican Council marked a major step forward in Christian openness to interreligious dialogue. The World Council of Churches established a programme for Dialogue in the 1970’s. In this period the efforts of Christian Churches focused on increasing awareness and understanding of Dialogue through the publishing of reports, articles and books written by both Muslims and Christians. By the 1980’s organisations such as the Muslim World League and the World Muslim Congress together with Christian organisations had established both formal and informal structures and programmes for Muslim Christian Dialogue.

Increasing mobility and the real-time communication that is now possible mean that Muslims and Christians hear about each other and come into contact with each other as never before. Here in Ireland this has become very true in the last decade. As a result, we Muslims and Christians need to understand, communicate and cooperate with each other especially in our everyday encounters as neighbours, friends and work colleagues. Dialogue, therefore is a necessity.



FACTS

- Ireland has, according to the 2011 Census, a population of 4.58 Million people.
- 4.1 million of these described themselves as Christian.
- 49,204 people described themselves as Muslims – a 74% increase since the 2006 Census.
- The Christian population in Ireland is made up of many denominations. The 2011 census recorded Christians under 18 categories. The actual number of denominations is much higher as some of these were generic, e.g. Evangelical.
- The Muslim population in Ireland broadly reflects the world situation with about 85% being Sunni Muslims, 10% Shia and the remaining 5% coming from other smaller groups.
- In the Muslim Community the largest single group are Irish Muslims, i.e. those who are Irish citizens by origin, birth or naturalisation. Irish Muslims make up roughly one third of the total number (exact census figures were not available at the time of printing).
- In terms of country of origin, Muslims in Ireland come from more than forty different countries around the world.



Chapter 1

WHAT IS INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE?

Interreligious dialogue, also referred to as interfaith dialogue, is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences. The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, (i.e. “faiths”) at both the individual and institutional level. Each party remains true to their own beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practise their faith freely.

Interfaith dialogue is not just words or talk. It includes human interaction and relationships. It can take place between individuals and communities and on many levels. For example, between neighbours, in schools and in our places of work - it can take place in both formal and informal settings.

In Ireland Muslims and Christians live on the same streets; use the same shops, buses and schools. Normal life means that we come into daily contact with each other. Dialogue therefore, is not just something that takes place on an official or academic level only – it is part of daily life during which different cultural and religious groups interact with each other directly, and where tensions between them are the most tangible.

Interreligious Dialogue is defined as:

“All positive and constructive inter-religious relations with individuals and communities of faith which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom.”

DIALOGUE AND PROCLAMATION 1991
(A document of the Catholic Church)

This definition tells us that Dialogue is about building constructive relationships with people of other faiths. It is about mutual understanding. It is about each partner respecting the religious freedom of the other.

WHAT DIALOGUE AIMS TO ACHIEVE

Dialogue seeks to:

- Increase mutual understanding, and good relations.
- Identify causes of tension in Christian Muslim relations. These are often economic, social or political rather than religious.

- Build understanding and confidence to overcome or prevent tensions.
- Break down the barriers and stereotypes which lead to distrust, suspicion and bigotry.

Interfaith Dialogue is not:

- About talking away or brushing aside differences. It does not aim at coming to a common belief.
- A way of converting the other. In dialogue each party remains true to their own faith.
- A space for arguing, attacking or disproving the beliefs of the other. It is about increasing mutual understanding and trust.

"I believe that interfaith dialogue is a must today, and that the first step in establishing it is forgetting the past, ignoring polemical arguments, and giving precedence to common points, which far outnumber polemical ones."

M. FETHULLAH GULEN

The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue: A Muslim Perspective

WHY DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS IS IMPORTANT

Below are two quotations that highlight the urgency and need for Muslims and Christians to cooperate. The first is taken from an address made by Pope Benedict XVI to Ambassadors from Muslim countries in 2006 in which he said:

Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is, in fact, a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends.

The second quotation is from a letter signed by 137 Muslim Scholars and Leaders from across the Muslim world and sent to Christian leaders in 2007. It says:

Muslims and Christians together make up over half the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians.

These statements highlight the urgent need for Muslims and Christians to address the polarisation that is growing between them. This has been fuelled by wars, persecution, injustices and by individuals and groups stirring up religious divisions to achieve political or material gain. Dialogue between Muslims and Christians is needed now more than ever before to address the issues causing this growing division. The fact that Muslims and Christians make up over 50% of the world's population makes dialogue and cooperation imperative.

Here in Ireland, over the past twenty years the Muslim population has grown to almost 50,000. Muslims are a permanent part of the Irish community.

While the process of integration in Ireland has a long way to go, it is true to say that so far it has been a positive experience. Comparatively speaking, in Ireland, the relationship between Muslims and Christians is very good. This is not so much because of what we have done or achieved but because:

- In Ireland we do not have the historical grievances that prevent dialogue and interaction between Muslims and Christians in many parts of the world.
- We do not share the accumulation of racial divisions and inequalities that plague relations between Muslims and Christians in other European countries such as France, Germany and the UK.
- In Ireland there have been no major racial clashes or incidents. Neither have we experienced the explosion of right-wing xenophobic politics evident in other European countries.

As a result of these factors the distrust and violence that marks the relationship between Muslims and Christians in some places is currently not evident in Ireland. These advantages greatly increase the possibility of Muslims and Christians living together in peace, harmony and cooperation. Yet we do not live in isolation – we are influenced by what we hear in the media and by

“We believe in the same God, the one God, the Living God who created the world... In a world which desires unity and peace, but experiences a thousand tensions and conflicts, should not believers favour friendship between the men and the peoples who form one single community on earth? ... Dialogue between Christians and Muslims is today more urgent than ever. It flows from fidelity to God. Sometimes, in the past, we have opposed and even exhausted each other in polemics and in wars ... I believe that today God invites us to change old practices. We must respect each other and we must stimulate each other in good works on the path to righteousness.”

POPE JOHN PAUL II, 1985

From a speech delivered to over 80,000 Muslims in Casablanca

what is happening elsewhere in the world. THEREFORE, THERE IS A SENSE OF URGENCY, A NEED TO BUILD UPON THE GOOD RELATIONS THAT WE HAVE, AND TO PROVIDE AN EXAMPLE OF UNDERSTANDING, TRUST AND COOPERATION THAT CAN BE FOLLOWED BY MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD.

Key to this is the promotion of respect and understanding between Muslim and Christian neighbours in local streets and residential areas. Members of both faiths need to come to know each other personally. Local interfaith contact, cooperation and interaction, in short dialogue, is of great importance as it makes a major contribution in helping to create an integrated and cohesive community at ease with diversity and secure in a sense of common purpose.



Chapter 2

WHAT OUR FAITH (ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY) TEACHES

Both Islam and Christianity call for dialogue and cooperation between Muslims and Christians.

CHRISTIANITY: The Gospels and especially the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10.25-37) teach that the call to love our neighbour does not just mean loving the person next door or a member of our own particular group or community. Reflecting this Gospel message, Church teaching regarding interreligious dialogue is very positive.

“The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator; in the first place among them are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day.” (Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium 16).

The Second Vatican Council’s Statement on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, commonly called *Nostra Aetate* (below), portrays the positive attitude towards dialogue with Muslims that is reflected in most Christian denominations.

NOSTRA AETATE

The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God.

Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honour Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the Day of Judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

NOSTRA AETATE 3 (1965)

This document “urges” Christians and Muslims “to strive sincerely for mutual understanding” and “to make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom.” In 1971 the World Council of Churches (WCC) representing Anglican, Protestant, and Orthodox churches, established an Office for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths. Since then both the WCC and the Vatican have sponsored many meetings between Christians and Muslims.

“All our encounters with people of other faiths must be based on the Christian principles of faith, hope and love. They ought also be based on respect for human rights, tolerance of difference and openness to new experiences and fresh learning.”

GUIDELINES FOR INTERFAITH
EVENTS AND DIALOGUE
Committee for Christian Unity and
the Bishops of the Church of
Ireland, p9

Unlike in the past, there is now, among most Christian denominations, a wish to promote mutual respect, understanding and cooperation between Muslims and Christians. This openness to interaction and cooperation reflects the Gospel call to *“Love one another as I have loved you.”* (Jn 13.34) All Christians therefore, have a part to play in creating a just society in which they can, faithful to their beliefs, live as good neighbours with people of other religions.

ISLAM: The Holy Quran, when referring to the attitude that Muslims should have towards Christians and Jews, says: *“argue with them in ways that are best”* (16.125) and calls on Muslims to *“compete in good works”* (i.e. to out-do Christians in their good works). The existence of different religious communities is recognised in the Quran: *“Had thy Lord willed, he would have made mankind one nation.”* (5.48) Muslims are also called on to be patient in dialogue: *“Bear, then, with patience, all that they say, and celebrate the praises of thy Lord, before the rising of the sun and before (its) setting.”* (50.39). There are many instances in the life example (the Sunna) of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh – facing page) that give guidance to Muslims on how to engage with Christians.

One such example is the Charter of Najran (facing page) in which the rights of Christians are protected and guaranteed.

For a broader Muslim view on interreligious dialogue see
“Bridge Building Between Christians and Muslims.”
www.islamicity.com/articles/Articles.asp?ref=IC0406-2353

MUSLIM RESPECT FOR THE PROPHET

Muhammad is revered and respected like no other human being. This is something many non-Muslims underestimate or find hard to understand. This respect is reflected in the practice of saying "Peace and Blessings upon Him (*Salla lahu alayhi wa sallam*)" each time his name is mentioned. In print this is abbreviated as "pbuh"

For Muslims the Prophet is the exemplar of true Islam – his life example is seen by Muslims as the perfect model of how to be Muslim.

Respecting this, the letters pbuh will be inserted each time the name of the Prophet is mentioned in this text.

CHARTER OF NAJRAN

"This is a message from Muhammad ibn Abdullah as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity near and far we are with them. Verily, I the servant the helpers and my followers defend them because Christians are my citizens and by Allah I hold out against anything that displeases them. No compulsion in religions is to be on them.

Neither are their judges to be removed from their jobs, nor their monks from their monasteries. No one is to destroy a house of their religion or to damage it or to carry anything from it to the Muslims houses. Should anyone take any of these he will spoil God's Covenant and disobey his Prophet.

Verily, these are my allies and have my secure charter against all that they hate. No one is to force them to travel or to oblige them to fight. The Muslims are to fight for them. No one of the Muslim nation is to disobey this covenant till the last day."

www.ijtihad.org/Prophet%20Muhammed's%20Promise.htm

AL QURAN

"Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious." QURAN 16.125

"And dispute ye not with the People of the Book (Christians and Jews), except in the best way, unless it be with those of them who do wrong: but say, We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you. Our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we submit." QURAN 29.46

"Had Allah willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works." QURAN 5.48

Chapter 3

DIFFERENT KINDS OF DIALOGUE

Dialogue is a means of building the openness, understanding and trust needed for Christians and Muslims to live and cooperate with each other despite their differences. It can take place in different ways and on different levels. These are briefly described here:

THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE OR DISCOURSE: This takes place on academic or official levels between experts, theologians and religious leaders. This kind of dialogue helps to clarify issues, to create greater understanding and remove prejudices. By establishing links and relationships between leaders, such dialogue can facilitate and enable practical cooperation and action on the other levels described below. The aim of this exchange is not to reach a common belief, but rather to clarify what each partner believes, to appreciate each other's spiritual values and to have a better understanding of differences.

Dialogue on this level has been happening for many years in places around the world, and has helped to increase understanding and cooperation. Unfortunately much of the good has been undone by the polarisation of Muslims and Christians taking place due to fanaticism, violence and socio-political unrest. More dialogue, not less, is needed to counter these negative trends. Here in Ireland dialogue between religious leaders is only just beginning and is a welcome development. The engagement of religious leaders in the dialogue process gives both encouragement and an example for people of both faiths to follow.

THE DIALOGUE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE: This involves interfaith prayer and also occasions when spirituality and religious texts are studied by members of both faiths. This kind of dialogue also requires a level of expertise.

Great care needs to be taken when preparing a Muslim Christian prayer service (or any interfaith event). It is important that there is a real reason

or need for the shared prayer: for example, when something significant happens in local communities calling for people to come together in prayer.

It is difficult to find forms of joint prayer that respect the sensibilities of both Muslims and Christians. One Prayer that is acceptable and often used is the Prayer of St Francis. Interfaith Prayer events often take the form of each participant listening respectfully to the prayer of the other. Silent reflection is also a powerful symbol.

PRAYER OF ST FRANCIS

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen

When preparing an interfaith prayer event the guiding principle should be that of respecting the beliefs of the other. All preparation should be done jointly with texts, words, symbols, actions and music discussed and agreed. Having a practice “dry run” of the planned event is a good idea as it will give all those organising the event a clear idea of what will happen, thus avoiding unforeseen and avoidable causes of offence or embarrassment. Once a format and Order of Service has been agreed, stick to it.

Examples of Interfaith Prayer Services and guidelines for preparing them can be found on the internet. www.coistine.ie/resources/interfaithevent
See also <http://assembly.uca.org.au/rof/religious-gatherings>

“Without dialogue between people of faith, the vacuum in communication and understanding can quickly and easily be filled by gossip, mistrust, prejudice, bigotry and racism. Bigotry is fed by fear and ignorance. Without dialogue and mutual respect, extremism and hatred can grow.

A proper approach will embrace learning about what adherents of a particular world faith say about their own faith rather than relying on what is alleged by others on their behalf.

When interfaith co-operation works well, all of our lives are enriched. The knowledge and understanding of others enhances our lives, helps us to understand difference, gives substance to our belief and points us towards lives rooted and grounded in love”.

GUIDELINES FOR INTERFAITH EVENTS AND DIALOGUE
Committee for Christian Unity and the Bishops of the Church of Ireland p 31

THE DIALOGUE OF COMMON ACTION: Christians and Muslims can work together to promote and preserve peace, liberty, social justice and moral values. Both faiths place a strong emphasis on justice and peace and on respect for human dignity. Both religions see human beings as stewards of God's creation, entrusted with the care of the earth. We share common concern for humanitarian values, the environment and for the proper use of the world's resources.

We should, therefore, collaborate in addressing social concerns based on these common religious motives and values. On a local level, we can work together to build better communities, and to provide voluntary services and facilities. Issues of social concern such as housing, drug abuse, street violence, unemployment, refugees and education are areas where Muslims and Christians can cooperate.

“Civilized people solve their problems through dialogue.”

FETHULLAH GÜLEN

A Turkish Muslim scholar and an advocate for dialogue

THE DIALOGUE OF LIFE: This is where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, the ordinary everyday business of getting on with each other, of being good neighbours and living in peace and harmony. This can be hard enough for a people of a common background but, where religious and cultural differences exist, more effort is needed. Note, the word “strive” is used above. There will be a need to make an effort to reach out, to understand, to break down our own prejudices and to overcome the barriers, stereotypes and suspicions that are in us all. This will not be easy and it will require perseverance. We will have to be patient, be willing to listen and to accept that people are different, or have a world-view different from our own. To live in peace as our faith requires demands this effort.

We can all engage in The Dialogue of Life and The Dialogue of Common Action. These require no special expertise, but they do require an openness to interact with the other in a spirit of respect and cooperation. These kinds of dialogue are important because they have a direct bearing on our daily lives and on how Muslims and Christians live together in the now multicultural and multi-religious Ireland.

The Dialogue of Life and of Common Action can take place in both formal and informal settings. Informally, dialogue can take place through

involvement in residents' associations, parent-teacher meetings, youth groups and sports clubs. It can happen between individuals, neighbours, friends and people we work with. All of these are occasions where mutual understanding and an appreciation of the other can grow. Faith may not even be discussed in these situations, but it can be witnessed to through action, respect and mutual support. Individually our involvement in the Dialogue of Life is very much about our attitude to each other and our disposition towards engaging with each other.



Interfaith event Cork City Hall 2010.

Chapter 4

ENGAGING IN DIALOGUE

For most people, involvement in dialogue between Muslims and Christians will take place in the ordinary passage of everyday life, through the contact we have with neighbours, during our work, or in the street. Some of us may be more formally involved with a local church, mosque or a voluntary group through which we come into contact with people of other religions. Others may also be actively seeking to engage in interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Hopefully, this resource will be of use to all, by making it clear that our faith calls us to dialogue with each other and by providing guidance on how to engage in it.

Some people may shy away from dialogue as they fear causing offence due to a lack of understanding of the other's faith. The information in these pages will help us to avoid unintended offence. We should also be encouraged by the fact that if we behave in a respectful way, and in accordance with what our Muslim or Christian faith expects, there is little chance that we will get it badly wrong. If someone does unintentionally get it wrong, we should be patient and correct gently.

Much of the contact or dialogue between us may not directly concern what we believe. However, all such occasions are valuable, as they lead us to know, understand and appreciate each other. Elsewhere in this resource is practical advice regarding customs, dress and food. Worries about these things should not prevent us from mixing with each other.

A basic principle of dialogue is that we do not have to sacrifice, change or dilute our own beliefs. In fact doing this would be a disservice to our dialogue partner. Dialogue is primarily about people meeting to gain a true appreciation of each other's faith.

Dialogue does not entail engaging in contentious debate or arguing about religion. It does however, call for a willingness to be open, to listen, and to respect the other. A willingness to set aside our own sense of religious superiority will also help us to see what is good and positive in the faith of the other.

Speaking at a recent Muslim Christian Workshop in Limerick Sheikh Umar Al-Qadri quoted a saying (a Hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), about God speaking to a person on the Day of Judgement: *There was a man who was hungry and if you had fed him you would have attained my*

pleasure, there was a man thirsty and if you had quenched his thirst you would have attained my pleasure.” (Sahih Al-Muslim) Christians will recognise that this is very similar to what is said in the Gospel of Matthew (25.35) – “For I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink.” Explaining the Hadith, Sheikh Umar then said:



Sheikh Umar Al-Qadri

“According to our divine texts and your divine texts, our way to get closer to God is to care for humanity. Interfaith dialogue is not about preaching, it is about sharing. It is not about converting, it is about serving. It is not about winning, it is about loving. It is not about becoming religious, it is about becoming spiritual. It is not about proving, it is about understanding. It is not about why, it is about why not and the possibilities. It is not about confrontation, it is about cooperation. It is not about becoming superior, in fact it is all about becoming human.”

Dialogue, in all its forms, involves a certain amount of patience and humility. Differences exist between us, but we share a common humanity and a wish to serve the God who made us. Both Islam and Christianity see serving our fellow man as being a way to serve God. Both faiths call on us to love our neighbour. DIALOGUE IS LIVING OUR FAITH IN THE PRESENCE OF PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITHS. IT IS A MEANS OF LOVING NEIGHBOURS WHO ARE NOT OF MY FAITH BY REACHING OUT TO THEM IN A SPIRIT OF OPENNESS AND TOLERANCE. In doing this, we do not have to engage in deep theological debate or depart from what we hold true. We do however, have to respect, cooperate, and live in peace with each other.

It will take time to build up relationships, to gain understanding, and to come to trust one another. Dialogue should begin by focusing on things we have in common and on practical things we can do together (see below). There are obstacles that prevent or make dialogue difficult. These need to be acknowledged and challenged.

OBSTACLES TO DIALOGUE

On a world level there is a tendency for both Muslims and Christians to generalise their perceptions of each other. This leads to stereotyping, such as all ‘Muslims are terrorists or support terrorists’ and ‘all Christians are decadent, immoral and unjust’. The reality is that the vast majority of Christians and Muslims are none of these things. To engage in dialogue, this tendency to generalise needs to be rejected and overcome. Interaction and contact with each other will show that such generalisations are untrue.



Without doubt, history is a major factor in shaping the way Muslims and Christians view each other. Our shared history has been marked by a variety of experiences, ranging from peaceful coexistence and cooperation to mutual vilification and armed conflict. It is a fact that there have been atrocities and injustices between Christians and Muslims. This history is something we should learn from but not live in. There have been centuries of negative arguments and debates (polemics) between Muslims and Christians. These often focused on comparing the ideal or theory of one faith with the worst examples of practice in the other. Efforts were also made to discredit, disprove or denigrate the other's belief. This type of argument serves no constructive purpose and is the opposite of dialogue which presupposes having a true understanding of the others religion rather than one that is exaggerated or twisted by bias.

Media coverage of Muslims and Islam in the western world, (perceived as the Christian world by Muslims), is often biased. In the world of films, the "bad guy", Red Indian, later replaced by the Nazi German, has now become the Muslim terrorist. The media often portrays Islam as a fanatical religion, in which all Muslims support terrorism. This is clearly not true. The overwhelming majority of Muslims reject terrorism, and Islam as a religion does not condone it.

Western films and TV programmes, beamed by satellite around the world, give Muslims the view that the western world is a decadent, immoral and corrupt place. The perceived acceptance of personal and sexual freedom, the decline of religious practice, high crime rates, drug and alcohol abuse, all reinforce the stereotypical view that Christians are immoral, corrupt and unjust.

These generalised and stereotypical views are false and encourage polarisation. Dialogue and contact between Christians and Muslims are a means of breaking down stereotypes and false views.

Another obstacle to dialogue is self-sufficiency. This is the belief that we, Christians and Muslims, have nothing to learn from or offer to each other. However, as we have already seen, our scriptures and traditions call us to dialogue. We worship the same God and serve Him through serving our fellow human beings. This common purpose should lead us to cooperate with each other to establish justice, peace and to care for the world we live in.

Yet another difficulty in dialogue is the fact that when we speak with each other, we may use the same words or terms but understand them differently. This can cause confusion and misunderstanding, thus preventing fruitful exchange. When we speak using terms like prayer, fasting, scripture etc., it is important that we take the time to make sure we understand them in the way our dialogue partner does.

WHAT DIVIDES US AND WHAT WE HAVE IN COMMON

The fact that there are irreconcilable differences between Islam and Christianity on matters central to both faiths will make dialogue difficult. For example, we differ regarding the status of Jesus. For Muslims he is a Prophet, for Christians Jesus is God made man. The unity and transcendence of God central to Islam are at odds with Christian belief in the Trinity and the Incarnation. We have different understandings of Revelation and Scripture and of God's relationship with humankind. For Christians, God's revelation is not only in the Bible, but also a revelation of Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. Christian scripture is inspired by God, but the words are the words of men. For Muslims, revelation is the Holy Quran, the verbatim word of God, revealing His will for humankind and sent down by Him to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

Christians see themselves as beloved children of God. Muslims cannot accept this as it implies humans being on the same level as God, thus compromising both His unity and transcendence. Instead Muslims see themselves as adoring and loving servants whose duty it is to submit to the unquestionable will of Allah. The status of women and differing views of religious liberty are also contrasting points between Christians and Muslims that cannot be denied.

In dialogue, each participant remains true to their own beliefs. Therefore, it must be accepted that there will be points upon which we can only differ. Even so, we can respect each other. If a relationship of trust has been built, then points on which we differ can be discussed in an atmosphere of respect rather than in the negative, polemical and destructive manner that has often characterised interaction between Muslims and Christians

While fundamental differences exist, we also share many common beliefs and values. Belief in One God, creator of us all, is central to both Islam and Christianity. We all believe in holy books or revelation. We believe in prophets, the day of judgement and in the afterlife. Muslims and Christians also value prayer, fasting, worship, almsgiving and pilgrimages to holy places. We both trace our faith back to Abraham/Ibrahim, we both honour Maryam/Mary, and although we differ in our understanding of Jesus/Isa, he is central to both religions.

These common points, together with our shared respect for human dignity and our common responsibility to care for creation, provide broad areas in which we can cooperate for the good of humankind and the created world. Even more basic than these broad areas of common concern is our shared wish to live in a place that is safe for our families, friends and community. Dialogue is a means of building such a place and, as we have seen, is a means consistent with what both Islam and Christianity teach.

Chapter 5

FOCUS ON IRELAND

A major change that has occurred during the last decade is the growing presence of Muslims, who now make up the second largest religious community in Ireland after Christians. Even though Muslims here come from many countries, including Ireland, they constitute a group that has a worldview noticeably different than that of most of the population. Therefore, how Muslims and the rest of the population get on together will have a major impact on Ireland's future and on the vital process of integration.

Dialogue can help to insure that Muslims and Christians, as individuals and communities, build bridges rather than walls, and include rather than exclude each other. Interfaith Dialogue aims to bring about the understanding, mutual respect and cooperation essential for both integration and social harmony. The negative situations that have developed in countries such as France, Germany and the UK put the need for interfaith dialogue into perspective.

Over the past two years, a project entailing a series of workshops and meetings involving Muslims and Christians has taken place at various locations around the country. Set against the background of Ireland's changing population over the last ten years the workshops have helped us



to understand some of the difficulties we face in Ireland and also identified responses to them (Reports from some of these events are available at www.coistine.ie/dialogue).

The workshops began by assessing the current relations between Muslims and Christians in Ireland.

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN IRELAND

- The workshops identified a general lack of understanding and even ignorance of each other's religions.
- There is a lack of both formal and social communication/interaction between Muslims and Christians.
- The present goodwill between Muslims and Christians in Ireland is very positive. However, it is superficial, and needs to be deepened through education for greater mutual understanding and through interaction that builds relationships and trust.
- The importance of Interreligious Dialogue to the future social wellbeing of Ireland is not fully understood or appreciated.
- Interfaith dialogue must be prioritised, especially by leaders who can best affect change.
- Many people, Muslim, Christian, and those of no faith, are apathetic towards integration and dialogue.
- The media poses a huge challenge – Islam is often portrayed negatively, engendering an unfounded fear of Muslims living here in Ireland.
- There is a lack of education and training for dialogue.
- The need for religious leaders to come together and to lead by example emerged as a core issue during the workshops. Since interreligious dialogue is, for members of both faiths, something new, unfamiliar and which may cause anxiety, the participation of religious leaders is crucial for its success.
- There is a need for people with expertise in dialogue who can guide and help people to engage in meaningful dialogue.
- Common ground for dialogue needs to be established: this includes the building of mechanisms, and providing occasions and structures through which people can meet and engage with each other in a safe and constructive manner.

The workshops and meetings also made practical suggestions as to how relations and interaction between Muslims and Christians in Ireland can be improved. Ultimately these suggestions can only be implemented by the joint action of members of the Muslim and Christian communities.

A certain level of dialogue will take place naturally as we meet and interact. However, for dialogue to be successful, leadership and organisation are essential. Faith groups have organisation, structures, established networks and direct contact with local communities. If religious leaders are willing to participate in dialogue then these invaluable resources could be used to promote contact and cooperation.

There is also a role for government, both national and local, in facilitating dialogue as a means to achieving the social cohesion and harmony that is the very reason for their existence. The following practical suggestions were made in the workshops:

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

(a) ESTABLISH OCCASIONS AT WHICH MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS INTERACT AND MEET. These could focus on areas of common interest such as community safety, neighbourhood concerns, or simply to exchange information about customs or religious occasions. These events will help to break down barriers, overcome stereotypes and create relationships. This will allow trust to grow and will, in time, allow tensions or contentious issues to be addressed in a constructive and non-polemical way.

During one of the workshops, a methodology for initial meetings between Muslims and Christians emerged. It specified that it is better to focus discussion on a specific issue rather than a broad topic such as interreligious dialogue. Focusing on a particular issue will let people know that the occasion is not a debate or about potentially contentious religious differences. This is a much more practical approach that will help the development of the shared common ground upon which people of both faiths may safely engage in dialogue. Using this method participants can:

- Come to know that they are welcome.
- Gain an experience of interaction which is constructive and not argumentative.
- Realise that their beliefs will be respected.

A neutral body could best facilitate initial contact between Muslims and Christians in a local area. Perhaps a voluntary organisation or the local authority could fulfil this function. In this way, Muslim and Christian

communities would be equal participants in the process. Initial meetings should take place in a communal location where all participants can feel welcome and comfortable.

(b) ESTABLISH A REGIONAL OR LOCAL MUSLIM CHRISTIAN FORUM. This structure could be both a forum for discussion and be responsible for overseeing the implementation of many of the suggestions made here. To succeed, a forum needs the participation of religious leaders from both faiths who could oversee the dialogue process in the local area. Agreed guidelines for dialogue could be established. The forum could, if necessary, have a mediation role that helps prevent community tensions and also be a credible body to challenge unfair media coverage.

(c) MAKE USE OF EXISTING CULTURAL, ART, SPORTING, SOCIAL AND LOCAL COMMUNITY EVENTS as occasions where mutual understanding, appreciation and trust can grow, and where Muslims and Christians can experience “we” rather than “us” and “them.” Muslims should be invited to participate and also be willing to do so.

(d) OCCASIONS FOR EDUCATION AND EXCHANGE ARE NEEDED. Talks and presentations can help to increase understanding and to overcome barriers. If and when visits to each other’s places of worship take place, these occasions need to be explained and guided. This will ensure that offence or embarrassment is avoided and that the mutual respect needed for dialogue is shown.

(e) RESOURCES, INFORMATION MATERIALS, WORKSHOPS AND COURSES SHOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE by Muslim and Christian groups to promote a true understanding of each other. Courses could also have a particular focus on preparing people to engage in dialogue.

(f) MAKE BETTER USE OF THE MEDIA. Faith groups should use local media positively to promote interreligious understanding and respect. Journalists should be provided with information, thus making it easy for them to publish good news stories about Muslims and Christians. The media could also be used to publicise interfaith activities or events. In addition, inaccurate or biased reporting should be challenged.

(g) CONTACT LOCAL FAITH GROUPS with a view to engaging them in the dialogue process. Send faith groups information promoting dialogue in a concise format that could then be easily used on notice-boards and in church or mosque bulletins.

(h) SEEK OR FACILITATE WAYS FOR FAITH LEADERS TO MEET AND ENGAGE WITH EACH OTHER. This is essential for meaningful dialogue.

(i) ORGANISE OR PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERFAITH PRAYER EVENT.

WHAT WE CAN DO AS INDIVIDUALS

- Make a personal commitment to dialogue and to preparing oneself for dialogue. You do not have to be an expert; but using the internet or resources such as this booklet to inform yourself about your neighbour's faith will help.
- Engage in dialogue – make an effort to communicate and cooperate with neighbours of different faiths. Be the one who takes the first step.
- Greet neighbours on the occasion of their religious feasts.
- Show respect for the religious customs and practices of others.
- Challenge stereotyping or prejudice.
- Use any opportunity available to interact and mix with members of other faith communities.
- Focus on what we as Muslims and Christians hold in common as the context for dialogue.
- Encourage and teach children to respect people of other faiths and cultures, and to reject prejudice and bias.
- Seek to include or welcome members of other faiths in any activity, community service or voluntary work you may be involved in. Invite them to participate.
- Participate in courses or events at which one can learn more about the faith of others.



DO'S AND DON'TS

To facilitate interaction, contact and dialogue, there is a need to be sensitive to each other's differing religious requirements and social norms. Some of these are listed here. Hopefully, this information will remove some of the initial fear we may have of causing offence to our dialogue partner.

SENSITIVITY TO GENDER SEPARATION: A Muslim woman is not expected to be alone with any male other than her husband or close male relatives.

Therefore, in arranging any meeting or activity involving Muslim women it is courteous to let them know in advance who will be present.

SHAKING HANDS: In general Muslims do not shake hands with people of the opposite sex. If shaking hands does take place, do so with the right hand. It is important that men do not shake the hand of a Muslim woman, unless the latter takes the initiative by holding out her hand.

SHOES: These should be removed when entering the prayer or carpeted area in a Mosque. Some Muslims also remove their shoes at home. Non-Muslims should follow their lead.

DRESS: Muslims, male and female, are expected to dress modestly. This forbids tight body hugging or revealing clothes. Men are expected to be covered from elbows to knees, and women from neck to feet. Muslim women are also expected to wear some form of head covering. In practice, this can vary greatly. Some wear no head covering at all, while others use a variety, such as:

- the *hijab*, a simple headscarf.
- the *niqab*, revealing only the eyes.
- the *burkah*, completely veiling the head and body.

This variety is due to different interpretations of Islamic teaching, culture and social norms. Personal choice and local customs also contribute to this variety.

GREETINGS: “*As-Salamu Alaikum*” (Peace be upon you) is the normal greeting that Muslims use with each other. While a tiny minority reserve its use for Muslims only, the vast majority of Muslims are happy and will not be offended if a non-Muslim greets them in this way. The response to this greeting is “*Wa-alaikum as-Salam*” (And Peace be upon you too).

RELIGIOUS DIETARY LAWS: Muslims do not eat pork (this includes ham, bacon and anything made from it like sausages, and many pizza toppings). Meat such as beef, lamb and chicken must be Halal (permitted) – i.e. slaughtered in accordance with Islamic law. Fish is permitted and vegetarian food is always acceptable. Most Muslims will eat prawns and similar seafood, but a minority will not. Food such as pastry will not be halal if it is made with lard or animal sourced ingredients. Alcohol is forbidden. For more information see: www.islamhalal.com and www.utoronto.ca/~facilities/documents/GuidetoHalalFoods.pdf

For Christians, no particular foods are forbidden. Alcohol is permitted by most Christian denominations, but becoming drunk is not. Some Christian denominations forbid alcohol. For occasions where Muslims and Christians socialise, the simplest approach would be to serve vegetarian food, fruit and soft drinks. If meat is served then it should be halal.

PLACES TO MEET: Meeting in a Coffee Shop is acceptable, but for many Muslims meeting in a place where alcohol is served is not. If the occasion is a formal interfaith meeting or discussion, a public or communal location would be advisable. When a relationship of trust is established, then meetings could, by mutual agreement, be rotated between Mosque and Church meeting spaces. With regard to times for meetings, avoid Fridays or Sundays, as these are the days for communal prayer in Muslim and Christian communities. Account also needs to be taken of the Feast Days of each religion (see below).

PRAYER TIMES: Muslims pray five times a day (morning, mid-day, mid-afternoon, evening and night). The specific clock times for these prayers varies throughout the year. Interfaith events or meetings may coincide with prayer times. Having a quiet and clean place available for prayer will be appreciated.

SOCIALISING: Muslims have strict views about dress, alcohol, dietary laws and the unsupervised mixing of genders. It is unlikely that Muslims would attend social events where alcohol or pork is served, or where teenagers, male and female, mix freely. These facts need to be taken into account if an interfaith event or social occasion is being organised.

VISITING A MOSQUE OR CHURCH: When visiting the place of worship of the other faith, whether as a group or as an individual, it is best to arrange the visit in advance with the Imam or the Priest/Minister in charge.

In the mosque women are expected to wear a scarf or some head covering and to wear loose, non-revealing clothing that cover the arms and legs. Everyone is required to remove their shoes before entering the main prayer room of the mosque. A mosque will have separate prayer areas for men and women. Christian tradition also expects women to dress modestly in Church. Women may wear a head covering in Church if they so wish, while it is generally accepted that men do not. If however, an Imam was visiting a Church, his traditional headwear would be acceptable. Shoes are not removed.

A non-Muslim present in a Mosque during the Salat Prayer (i.e. the formal prayer that Muslims perform five times each day) should stand respectfully behind or to one side while the prayer is going on. For a Muslim attending a Christian service sitting or standing respectfully is acceptable.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS AND OCCASIONS:

CHRISTIAN: Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas are the major Christian Feasts. Individual Saints also have particular days when they are remembered. For example, in Ireland, St Patrick's Day, the 17th of March, is marked both as a feast day and a national holiday. Many Christians also mark the period of Lent, the forty days before Easter, as a time of reflection, fasting and for turning to God. Unlike the specific requirements of Ramadan, the activities of Christians during Lent are matters of personal choice.

MUSLIM: During the month of Ramadan, the month of the first revelation of the Quran, Muslims fast for 30 days during daylight hours. This concludes with *Eid-al-Fitr* – the celebration of the breaking of the fast. *Eid-al-Adha*, the Feast of Sacrifice recalling Abraham's sacrifice of his son Ishmael, takes place at the end of the annual Hajj Pilgrimage. *Milad-un-Nabi* (the Prophet's birthday) is also celebrated by some Muslims.

Note: The Islamic Calendar is lunar, and the year is shorter than the Solar Gregorian Calendar used in the western world. Therefore, according to the solar calendar, Muslim feasts occur about eleven days earlier each year.

CONCLUSION

At present, many people are simply unaware of the need for interreligious dialogue. Some are not interested while others actively oppose interfaith cooperation. These facts should not stop our efforts to build interaction and understanding between Christians and Muslims. In Ireland, the multi-religious and multicultural nature of our society is still a relatively new experience. Therefore, for many, the need to make an effort in order to insure that we live together in peace and justice has not yet been fully realised.

As people of faith and as people who wish to build social harmony and justice, we have a role to both raise awareness of this need and to actively respond to it. There are people who will listen and who do appreciate the need for mutual respect, understanding and cooperation between Christians and Muslims. We can begin with these and through them others will be convinced of the need for openness and interfaith dialogue.

Chapter 6

RESOURCES

Reproduced here are guidelines written by the Methodist Scholar and Theologian Dr Kenneth Cracknell. (While these and other guidelines referred to below were drawn up to guide a wider multi-faith dialogue, they also apply to Muslim Christian dialogue.) These are reproduced here verbatim because they are among the best found while researching this resource. They first give general principles for dialogue and then some practical advice.

Links to other guidelines are also given at the end of this section. Be sure to investigate some of these as they give good practical advice.

GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE

(Source: Dr Kenneth Cracknell, <http://www.interfaithathens.org/article/art10022.asp>)

1. Dialogue invites us to come together as people, not as belief systems. It acknowledges that each religious tradition is pluralistic within itself, and realizes that each dialogue partner speaks from a particular religious perspective that cannot – and does not – represent all adherents of that faith. Dialogue also recognizes that each participant is located within a particular cultural, political, and economic perspective and inevitably brings particular loyalties, commitments, and preconceptions to the relationship. Through dialogue, we get to know one another as individuals.
2. Dialogue, which is characterized by courtesy and respect, is most productive when its participants are considerate, open-minded, and genuine in their desire to learn from the other partners. Each tradition's scripture, beliefs, and practices deserve our respect for having brought countless diverse people into a relationship with God.
3. Dialogue is enhanced if participants have engaged in a preliminary investigation of the other faith tradition, as well as in an informed and self-critical reflection upon their own faith identity. We must come prepared to the best of our ability, for dialogue enjoins us to listen with and speak from the heart as much as the head, to be open, vulnerable, honest, and sensitive to feelings of frustration or offense.

4. Dialogue enables us to confront inherited preconceptions. It asks us to remember that Christians and Muslims share a history of both fruitful exchange and peace as well as of misunderstanding and fierce conflict. In dialogue, we are mindful that ambiguous situations sometimes can be misinterpreted or misrepresented. Dialogue deliberately seeks to identify and dispel common stereotypes and inherited misconceptions based on misinformation.
5. Dialogue recognizes that in order to reach a clear understanding, we must pay attention to vocabulary. Some words have specialized meaning within a religious system; the meaning of others varies over time or within certain contexts or between cultures. Dialogue entails a careful clarification of our use of language.
6. Dialogue asks us first to understand, and only then to be understood. In dialogue, we listen in order to understand the other's point of view and seek to understand each person as they understand themselves. We seek to understand each religious system "from within" or on its own terms, while temporarily setting aside our own critical presuppositions.
7. Dialogue is enhanced by each participant's strong faith convictions. In a context of courteous listening and mutual trust, we can offer an authentic expression of our own personal faith. Dialogue involves a humble and sincere exchange of information about each participant's faith journey and sustaining religious tradition.
8. Dialogue seeks to share, challenge, and be challenged. Insisting one's own religious tradition's superiority inevitably undermines productive dialogue. We can be truly respectful of the integrity of our dialogue partner's religious identity only if we avoid all attempts at proselytizing.
9. Dialogue can occur on many levels besides that of theological discussion. For example, it is enriched through interactions of friendship and hospitality, working together in community projects and celebrations, and making common cause to solve social problems. Dialogue is most vital and effective when we pray together, open our homes to each other, and actually share our lives together.
10. Dialogue should be transformative, opening the windows of the mind and spirit to a broader vision of God's presence in the world.



Having outlined guidelines and principles Dr Cracknell provides some practical suggestions for interfaith dialogue meetings:

- A. Fair and thoughtful planning, done together and well in advance, can help ensure that both Christians and Muslims feel comfortable and welcome at meetings. A skilful and knowledgeable moderator, as well as a neutral environment, may smooth initial encounters, for it is important to encourage real discussion and interaction among participants. Dialogue is enriched by wide-ranging participation, including persons of various ages, socioeconomic levels, types of spirituality, and cultures.
- B. Anticipating that we will encounter both similarities and differences, dialogue recognizes that mutual acceptance and understanding, not absolute agreement, is the main goal. Initially, dialogue should focus on common features and similarities, without minimizing differences, while working to build the trust that will allow candid discussion of those differences. Issues for early discussions might include the five pillars of Islam and their Christian counterparts or concerns related to social justice, ecology, or the challenges of secularism. A host of other issues will raise themselves in the early meetings.
- C. We should have realistic expectations about our meetings. Dialogue is a long-term and on-going process of building community, not a few shared encounters. Still, the journey can be taken only one step at a time. All participants should be encouraged to make an active and steadfast commitment to walking together toward understanding and peace.

MORE RESOURCES

All the websites listed below can easily be accessed via links in:
www.coistine.ie/dialogue_resource

RELATIONS WITH OTHER FAITHS: This Australian website provides practical information. <http://assembly.uca.org.au/rof/religious-gatherings/>.

SCARBOROUGH MISSIONS: A Canadian website that provides clear, well laid out principles and also some practical guidelines for interfaith dialogue.
https://www.scarboromissions.ca/Interfaith_dialogue/guidelines_interfaith.php#resolutions

THE AMERICAN MUSLIM WEBSITE: <http://theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php>
 This site is well worth having a look at. For those who want a deeper reading it also has a section containing articles written by Muslim, Christians and Jewish writers on the topic of dialogue. This section can be accessed directly via:
http://theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php/features/articles/interfaith_dialogue_issues/

THE CORDOBA INITIATIVE: Founded in 2004, the Cordoba Initiative is a multi-national, multi-faith organisation dedicated to improving understanding and building trust among people of all cultures and religions. <http://www.cordobainitiative.org/>

CENTRE FOR MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: The Centre's mission is to improve relations between the Muslim world and the West and enhance understanding of Muslims in the West. This website is a good source for information on current events affecting relations between Muslims and Christians <http://cmcu.georgetown.edu/>

THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES WEBSITE: A worldwide fellowship of 349 churches seeking unity, a common witness and Christian unity. www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/interreligiousdialogue/

RELIGIONS FOR PEACE: Religions for Peace is the largest international coalition of representatives from the world's great religions dedicated to promoting peace. <http://www.religionsforpeace.org/about/>

ROYAL INSTITUTE FOR INTER-FAITH STUDIES: This was established in 1994 in Amman, Jordan, under the patronage of HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal. It provides a venue in the Arab world for the study and rational discussion of religion and religious issues, with particular reference to Christianity in Arab and Islamic society. <http://www.riifs.org/>

A COMMON WORD: This website is based on the letter "A Common Word Between Us" that was addressed to Christian leaders around the world, and signed by 138 Muslim scholars. This letter is an important contribution to Christian Muslim relations and dialogue. In addition to providing the text of the letter itself this website gives responses to it. www.acommonword.com

DUBLIN CITY INTERFAITH FORUM. DCIF works with interested members of faith communities to deliver interfaith gatherings and activities in Dublin City. DCIF seeks to provide the space and opportunity for Faith Communities to build relationships with and between Dublin City communities, statutory and voluntary organisations and the residents of Dublin City. <http://www.dublincityinterfaithforum.org/>

UNDERSTANDING ISLAM AND CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS
This website set up by Dr Chris T R Hewer, an Anglican Scholar, who has a background in Christian theology, education, Islamic studies and inter-faith studies. He has worked in the field of Christian-Muslim relations since 1986. This website contains various articles that can be downloaded. www.chrishewer.org

LINKS TO CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, INTERNATIONALLY. This website set up by Norwegian Professor Oddbjørn Leirvik is in itself a vast resource with links to many other websites. Be sure to check the Resources section. <http://folk.uio.no/leirvik/Chrismusint.html>

GLOSSARY OF ISLAMIC TERMS: <http://www.islamicity.com/IslamicGlossary>

Disclaimer: The above sites are referenced solely in regard to their content concerning interreligious dialogue. This publication does not endorse or necessarily agree with any other content in these websites.

G Forde, Cois Tine, SMA Justice Office, Wilton, Cork, IRELAND, 2013

This publication is aimed at both Muslims and Christians in Ireland. It promotes the development of mutual respect, understanding and cooperation between them, especially on the level of everyday life in local communities.

Over the past two years, a project entailing a series of workshops and meetings involving Muslims and Christians has taken place at various locations around the country. This resource contains the learning from these events. In addition, it defines what Interfaith Dialogue is, what it aims to achieve and provides practical guidance on how to engage in dialogue.

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