

Why Dialogue?

- **Why is dialogue important?** Understanding that we are all children of God, good creations, it is important for us to understand and to value the diverse perspectives in our global community. Dialogue helps us build relationships with all God's people around the world.

Getting Started:

preparing yourselves
for constructive dialogue

- **Dialogue is not debate.** Know your goals. Seek not to change one another, but rather to learn from one another. Come to the table ready to listen and ready to increase your understanding of your partner. Dialogue is conversation, two-way interactions.
- **Define yourself.** Be clear about your own beliefs and those of your faith tradition. Try to present your beliefs clearly to your dialogue partners. *Let your dialogue partners define themselves.* Allow them to express their beliefs and their faith traditions in their own terms. Remember that words and terms hold different meanings for different traditions.

- **Dialogue is two-pronged – learning about other and learning about self.** As you dialogue with your partners about their beliefs, you also reflect on the beliefs of your own tradition and seek to understand them more clearly and fully.

Meeting Each Other:

starting the conversations

- **Create an atmosphere of honesty and openness.** Dialogue requires a sense of friendship and stress on hospitality. Treat one another as guests exploring one another's tradition.
- **Know where you are coming from.** Remember that your beliefs and those of your partner are shaped by life situation, social context, and cultural traditions. Religious beliefs cannot be separated from cultural context.
- **Bring the past, present, and future together in a meaningful way.** Know your tradition's history, present, and future path, but don't fight old battles from centuries past. Be honest about where your tradition comes from, where it is going, and problems you see or visions and goals that you have.

The Road to Communication:

avoiding stumbling blocks

- **Be self-critical.** If you can't at least minimally criticize your own tradition, you imply that your tradition is absolutely correct and has all the answers. This attitude would make dialogue unnecessary. Instead, be open to finding fault with your tradition and to seeing opportunities for positive change and growth.
- **Dialogue requires equality between all participants.** Remember that all persons are worthy of respect, created in God's own image. If you view your dialogue partner as inferior or discredit his/her beliefs as false, dialogue cannot occur. Make sure that dialogue groups have similar representation so that all views are fully and equally represented.
- **Remember that dialogue occurs person to person,** even though you may be representing a particular faith. Dialogue is about real, living faith, not abstract doctrines.

- **Deal openly with the hard issues as well as the easy issues.** Don't avoid subjects known to be controversial. Address sensitive topics directly so that tension and anxiety about these important issues don't pervade the dialogue.
- **Be open to the direction that the dialogue takes.** Don't come to the conversation with a set idea of what the major points of disagreement are. Through dialogue, you might discover that the critical issues are otherwise than thought originally.
- **Separate the essential elements of each faith tradition from the non-essentials.** Focus your conversation on the former. Don't get caught up in peripheral practices. Focus on the beliefs that are most crucial.
- **Don't require more agreement from your partners in dialogue that you require from your own faith tradition.** Most faith traditions encompass within them a wide range of beliefs. Since variety is allowed within traditions, expect and accept variety across traditions as well.

Moving Forward:

next steps in dialogue

- **Use the increased understanding from your dialogues to create activities for renewal and continued conversation.** Attempt to experience the faith of your dialogue partner from within. Use your conversations to explore possibilities for joint community service, combined worship experiences, etc.

For further study:

Brown, Robert McAfee and Leonard Swidler. "Ground Rules for Dialogue."

"Called to be Neighbors and Witnesses." *The Book of Resolutions*. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2000.

"Confessing Christian Faith in a Pluralistic Society." Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research. 1995.

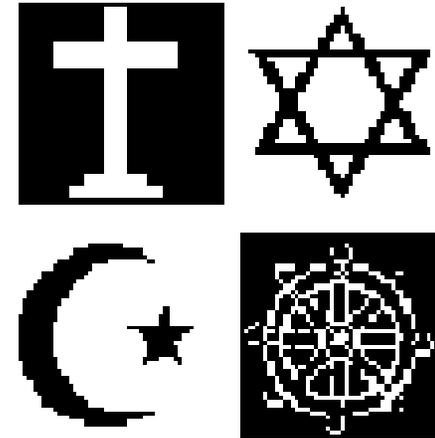
"Interfaith Relations and the Church." National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. Nov. 10, 1999.

Swidler, Leonard. "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious, Interideological Dialogue." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. Winter, 1993.

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Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue



General Commission on
Christian Unity and
Interreligious Concerns

The United Methodist Church