

TEN RULES FOR ENGAGING IN INTERFAITH RELATIONS

Mission belongs to the very being of the church. Proclaiming the word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. At the same time, it is necessary to do so according to gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings.

For Christians it is a privilege and joy to give an accounting for the hope that is within them and to do so with gentleness and respect (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).

- From *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*, World Council of Churches, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the World Evangelical Alliance.

(1) Have a good grasp of your own tradition

When engaging in dialogue a person needs to bring with them a deeply lived experience of their own tradition in order to be able to share its fruits with others.

(2) Come to dialogue in order to learn and grow; not to change the other

Each person who enters into dialogue needs to come with an openness to learn and to change in their own attitudes and perceptions, not out of a desire to change the other. In this way all those who participate will be changed in some way as a result of the dialogue.

(3) Be willing also to help your own faith community to grow and change

Since dialogue is a corporate activity it is necessary that each person enters into dialogue not only across faith lines but also with other members of their own faith community, to share with them the fruits of interfaith dialogue. In this way the whole community can eventually learn and change, gaining ever more perceptive insight into reality.

(4) Be honest and sincere and assume that others are equally honest and sincere

Real dialogue is built on mutuality and trust.

(5) Respect the religious experience and identity of others and anticipate that they will do the same for you

Each dialogue partner can best define what it means for them to be an authentic member of their own tradition. This does not preclude a person changing, deepening, expanding and modifying their self-definition and understanding as a result of dialogue. Conversely, the one interpreted should be able to recognize themselves in the interpretation of others.

(6) Don't assume in advance where points of agreement or disagreement will exist

Listen with empathy and sympathy and avoid presumptions about what the other will say. See how much is held in common while maintaining the integrity of your own tradition. If there is a real point of disagreement it needs to be respected. However it may be at a different point than that which was originally expected.

(7) Be prepared to participate in dialogue on an equal footing

Each partner needs to come prepared to learn from the other and to share their own understanding on an equal basis. There is no such thing as one-way dialogue.

(8) Be self-reflective and prepared to critique your own tradition

In dialogue a person needs to combine healthy self-criticism with an ability to hold to one's religious tradition with integrity and conviction. A lack of such self-criticism implies that one's own tradition already has all the correct answers and that one has nothing to learn. Such an attitude makes dialogue not only unnecessary but almost impossible.

(9) Strive to experience the other's faith "from within" and be prepared to view yourself differently as a result of an "outside" perspective

A religion is not merely something of the head, but also of the spirit, heart and "whole being", individual and communal. John Dunne speaks of "passing over" into another's religious experience and then coming back enlightened, broadened and deepened.

(10) Try to be aware of the cultural conditioning and historical memory we bring to dialogue

In Western culture, for example, we need to take account of the fact that we are heirs to the values of the Renaissance and Enlightenment. Some participants in dialogue may come with painful memories of past injustices. It is important to be aware of how historical memory and cultural influences may impact on our dialogue.

Resources:

L Swidler, "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue", Journal of Ecumenical Studies, (20:1, Winter 1983)

P Cunningham and A Starr (eds), 'Sharing Shalom' a process for interfaith dialogue between Christians and Jews, (NY: Paulist Press 1998)

A. Wingate, "Mission as dialogue – a contextual study from Leicester, UK" (unpublished article)