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COUNCIL FOR  
AUSTRALIAN  
CATHOLIC WOMEN

INTERIM GUIDELINES FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

## Preamble

Dialogue between people of different faiths has a crucial contribution to make towards building a vibrant and harmonious community life in Australia. Interfaith dialogue brings people of different religions together in an atmosphere of freedom and openness. It enables people to listen to one another, to grow in understanding and to seek opportunities to create greater peace and harmony in the world through the joint promotion of moral values, development and justice.



## Types of Dialogue

Dialogue requires both listening and active communication, and it can take many forms.

*The dialogue of everyday life* is where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.

*The dialogue of action* sees Christians and others collaborating in the interests of the development and well-being of people in their society.

*The dialogue of theological exchange* is where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spirituality.

*The dialogue of religious experience* involves people who are grounded in their own religious traditions, who share their spiritual riches – e.g. in the aspects of prayer and contemplation, faith, and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.

## Benefits of Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue can help us grow in our own faith if we remain open to the action of God. Religions themselves can benefit as they are enriched and refined by their encounter with the beliefs, practices and values of other faiths. Dialogue can also be a means of building up and strengthening social harmony. It lessens the possibility that religion will become a factor which aggravates already existing political, racial, social or other divisions and tensions.

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

Everyone 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 real dialogue 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. Appreciating another person's religious experience can be enlightening and broadening.

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

We are all products of our culture. Some participants may come to the dialogue with painful memories of past injustices done in the name of religion. It is important to be aware of how historical memory and cultural influences may impact on our dialogue.

In addition, try to understand the foundational documents of the faith (eg. Bible, Scripture Qúran, etc.) with which you are in dialogue from the perspective of that faith tradition.



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. But that does not prevent them from changing, deepening, expanding and modifying their self-definition and understanding as a result of dialogue. It is also desirable that people be able to describe themselves and their faith in such a way that they recognise themselves when others interpret what they have heard described.

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 from what 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.



## Dialogue and Proclamation

Interfaith dialogue and sharing one's own faith are to be recognised as distinct, though related, activities with different goals. It is the right of every religious believer to propose his or her religion to others with the hope that they may welcome it, believe in it and embrace it. Dialogue, on the other hand, aims at meeting a believer of another religious conviction in order to listen, to speak, to understand, to be enriched and to cooperate for the good of society. Neither one must be used as a means to the other. Dialogue is helped when there is mutual freedom in sharing one's religion. The essential and underlying relationship between dialogue and sharing is the need for mutual respect. There is no place in either dialogue or in sharing for proselytism, which involves the use of pressure – physical, psychological, political, economic, social or otherwise – to bring about conversion.

The church, therefore, urges its sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, together with their social life and culture.

*(Nostra Aetate, #2)*



## Four Principles of Interfaith Dialogue

1. Dialogue begins when people meet people.

In dialogue we foster and encourage relationships, a process which takes patience and perseverance.

2. Dialogue depends on mutual understanding and mutual trust.

In dialogue we need to reach the point where we can be honest with each other.

3. Dialogue makes it possible to share in service to the community.

Dialogue which leads to action is likely to occur because individuals in the group, or the group together, have been inspired to act.

4. Dialogue becomes a means of authentic witness.

Sharing good news happens naturally within the context of dialogue. We are all called to witness to the faith that is within us. This principle is vital because it removes the false dichotomy between dialogue and proclamation of the Gospel. As Christians we are called to witness to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. There need be no compromise here.



## Ten Rules for Interfaith Dialogue

The very nature of the gifts that Christ has given the Church demands that they be extended to others and shared with others...To this internal drive of charity which seeks expression in the external gift of charity, We will apply the word 'dialogue'.  
(Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, n.64)

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 their own attitudes and perceptions, not with 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.

For dialogue to be effective it is necessary for each person also to enter into dialogue with other members of their own faith community, to share with them the fruits of interfaith dialogue. In this way the communities can eventually learn and change, gaining ever more perceptive insight into reality.

