

# Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue Guidelines

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## We believe the following:

1. Dialogue is only possible when we respect each other's individuality. Thus, knowledge of others in their cultural setting is essential. By recognizing and accepting social, cultural, and religious diversity, an exchange of mutual values and union in collaboration, humanity ultimately will be led to unity.

2. Everything is actively involved in a continuous growth process toward a better world in an ever-higher intellectual and spiritual environment. This awareness that all people belong to the same family, through their common origin and destination, should lead to a higher universal responsibility to practice this awareness in our lives.

3. The inspiring role of the leaders of world religions, traditions, and other convictions is of prime importance in our effort to create a better world order in peace and justice. In their cultural and philosophical traditions, their churches, organizations and institutes are the organizations *par excellence* to proclaim and sustain universally accepted moral principles.

4. The tenets of world religions and other faith traditions have their roots in their native culture, have developed on the basis of their culture's philosophical and moral concepts, and have approached and proclaimed the faith in transient expressions and culturally appropriate ceremonies. As pilgrims always on their way to new discoveries and subject to change, no faith community should claim exclusive representation of the Truth or superiority.

5. The world religions should move from their "approach of converting" to an "approach of testifying." The essential elements of one's own faith should be presented in a language understandable by the local faithful, so that dialogue between the world religions and faith traditions will lead to a better mutual knowledge and understanding, and to an exchange of mutual values. This will enrich one's faith and that of others.

6. In the passionate search for the truth and a more comprehensive approach to spirituality, meditation should be re-evaluated and practiced to engender a deeper awareness of the Divine presence. Meditation crosses all religious boundaries and is universally shared and accepted. Silent meditation should be part of all interreligious encounters.

7. People involved in interreligious and intercultural dialogue must remain aware of and concerned about our world's escalating ecological, social, economic, and financial problems.

Accepting these seven guidelines could become a major stepping stone to a union, in collaboration between the world religions and other faith traditions, that transcends doctrinal differences. Such a dialogue in collaboration with the political world would be the most effective contribution toward more efficient solutions to the world problems. At the same time, it would be an important stepping stone to a new world order of more peace and justice for all.

## Elucidation Summary:

**Par. 1:** Real dialogue is possible only in the presence of mutual knowledge and acceptance of cultural and religious values. Racism can be described as intolerance and nonacceptance of other cultures, with ignorance as its main cause. All opponents of racism argue for tolerance. However, tolerance implies discrimination, because one tolerates something that one wishes were not there. Given this, it should be replaced by acceptance of others in respect of the values inherent in their cultures, religions, and customs. Accepting others must mean more than tolerance – it should mean accepting them as members of the community without necessarily any loss of their unique identity. Such mutual acceptance should integrate both sides' values into a culturally richer community. Where there is respect, there will be willingness and even readiness to integrate some of those values to enrich one's own cultural and religious values. Such respect for others requires a certain knowledge of the others' history, historical and cultural development, ways of life, and other factors. Thanks to developments in communication technology, such knowledge is now readily available.

**Par. 2:** The recent trend of re-evaluating religion, spirituality, meditation, silence, and so-called soft human virtues can be considered in full agreement with the optimistic life-view of the Jesuit Father Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), as expressed in his main books on humanity's slow but sure spiritualization progress, and with the Dalai Lama's 1992 document "The Global Community and the Need for Universal Responsibility." The growth in common knowledge and an ever-higher intellectual heritage passing from one generation to the next has brought millions of people into contact with different cultures and religions. Our world is becoming multicultural, while the formerly mostly unilaterally decided national borders are losing their importance, as in the European Union (EU). Regional identity and languages are becoming more important in bringing people together.

One of the latest revolutionary trends is the political world's overture to faith communities as partners and advisers in analyzing current problems. Jacques Delors, former president of the EU Commission in Brussels, has created inside the Commission a "Forward Studies Unit" to study the EU's ethnic dimensions. For the last 5 years, it has been organizing a yearly interreligious/interpolitical symposium in various European cities. Each time, some 120 people participated. The EU can be considered a forerunner in this field. Let's hope that it will be followed by other governments.

**Par. 3:** In the individualistic West, there is a growing tendency to place the individual in the foreground as the decision maker in moral matters based on his or her individual conscience. This explains the attractiveness of the New Age movement and of innumerable new religious sects competing for followers in poverty-stricken South American and African countries. Many faithful Catholics and other Christians have lost faith in their churches as institutions, mainly because the highest authorities are slow to adopt to current needs and trends. Guidance from above remains an essential and irreplaceable element in people's moral behavior. Nothing can replace the world religions as institutions.

The world religions, as institutions joining with the recent enunciations of free-thinking humanists that they also are a religious community, should unite globally in a union of collaboration to increase the effectiveness of their moral and ethical guidance in personal and worldly matters. Such a dream would receive the enthusiastic support of young people searching for a new ethical basis for their lives.

The ethical basis for such a union is available in the global ethic declaration of the Catholic theologian Hans Kung and his colleague Karl-Josef Kuschel of Germany. This global ethic, after vigorous discussion, was received enthusiastically, approved

tentatively, and declared publicly at the Parliament of World's Religions meeting in Chicago in 1993, which was attended by 7,000 religious and spiritual personalities from all world religions and traditions. Its main ideas are summarized in following three catch phrases:

- ? No human life without a world ethic for nations.
- ? No peace among nations without peace among religions.
- ? No peace among religions without dialogue among religions.

A second important ethical document is the "Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities," announced on September 1, 1997, by Tokyo's InterAction Council and supported by the elderly statesmen of 28 countries. It can be considered an emanation of the Japanese and Eastern way of life, reflecting their cultural values and giving priority to responsibilities and duties above rights. It also is a most opportune addition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Grassroots parish and social workers, peace promoters, and NGOs should be involved in this union.

**Par. 4:** It is a very opportune trend that Biblical exegesis, as practice in Christian communities for the past 50 years, is now a part of most Christian communities. This is not yet the case in Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu communities.

It is now considered self-evident that Divine Revelation's formulation is influenced greatly by the culture in which it originated, and that this form of presentation is not revelation itself. Although these presentations and interpretations undergo a continuous change appropriate to the believers' ever-changing knowledge and ever-higher conscience level, the essentials never change. The revolution in Biblical exegesis from literalism to a culturally appropriate describing and relating interpretation, especially in Christian theology, is the most valuable evolution and development of the last 50 years toward interfaith dialogue and real inculturation. The liturgical changes in Catholic Eucharistic ceremonies, such as replacing Latin with the local language, have been so many steps in this evolution of adaptation.

Accepting this position causes one to accept others as equals and limits, to a reasonable degree, any remaining feelings of superiority. These renewals also have been at the origin of the increasing number of interfaith dialogue meetings in the past 40 years, which saw one of its happenings in Chicago's international interfaith meeting, organized by the Parliament of the World Religions in 1983.

All of this has resulted in an growing understanding of other religions and cultures, and a growing mutual respect and acceptance of the values of others. This even has resulted in an integration effort of others' cultural and religious values in one's own faith-life as a rethinking and a deepening of personal faith. Advances in communication, as well as global migrations and the resulting inculturation process, have made a global interfaith dialogue possible.

**Par.5:** Many of us accept the existence of a spiritual power or spiritual being, whether a person with a sublimation of human characteristics (compassion and love) or as a difficult-to-define karma or buddhahood, to which the spiritual existence of everything belongs as its origin and final destination.

Most religious scholars now admit that each world religion has its origin in a particular culture, of which the eternal truth's wording and each religion's religious ceremonies are a part. Culture changes over time, due to increased general knowledge, science, and lifestyles. Life, as it was experienced at the time of the founders of the world religions and other faith traditions, bears almost no resemblance to modern life and conceptions.

Thanks to philology, archeology, and anthropology, we can better understand and interpret sacred texts and how they originated and developed in their contemporary contexts and surroundings.

Therefore, no faith community should claim to have the whole truth or be the world's savior. Christians and Muslims, as well as other people of religion, should admit that claims of exclusivity have led to abuse.

Many fear that accepting other cultures or religions within their borders means losing their own values. A unification and further homogeneity of the world population, based on accepting and acknowledging the cultural values of others, enriches our own culture as well as the world's culture.

This can be applied to religious perception. In the absence of claims to absolute truth, there is no need to convert others. As each world religion has its own unique values, passing them on to deepen the faith of others is an important element in drawing closer together. This realization also could end the rivalry between faith communities and allow people to choose the faith tradition they will follow. Such an acceptance and experiencing of these values and truths also will increase knowledge and perception of the Divine Mystery, the final and eternal truth.

Interfaith dialogue seeks to reach a better mutual understanding and to engage in common activities. Its main attitude is reconciliation in order to create a better and more peaceful world, to share the world's resources equally, and to help the underprivileged. Doctrinal, communal, or religious union should not be the real aim; rather, we should work for union in collaboration to do something together, to rise above discussions on doctrinal and ceremonial similarities and differences. Such union in collaboration is possible only in diversity in and in conserving as much as possible our own identity in an increasingly homogenous world. These are converging, not contradictory, developments. This is true for nations and countries where borders are becoming less important or even disappearing, and also for religious. It seems evident that such a union can be realized only by collaborating with each other in a common global range of activities.

**Par. 6:** The West's growing contact with Hindu and Buddhist spirituality and meditation probably has contributed greatly to the recent interest in all kinds of spiritual practices, from yoga to Zen meditation and New Age meetings. Where the West has been used more active prayers and active intellectual meditation as religious practices, the East has surprised us with other, more passive ways of approaching the inexpressible Divine Mystery. In their dictionary, there is no "God" as understood in the monotheistic religions. The Divine lives and is present in everything, especially in each person's self. Buddhist and Hindu mediation and contemplation do away with the "self" to discover the real "Self" by becoming free of thought and desire, by becoming empty of the "self" so that the "Self" can reign. This way still might be reserved for a few, but the numbers of such people continues to grow markedly. Daily meditation can be practiced by anyone, for it is a matter of living in conscious awareness of others as members of the same family and of all the things around us. Just being aware helps us to concentrate on essentials, to eliminate stress, and especially to become aware of our brothers and sisters of the one Earth-family under the same Heaven.

**Par. 7:** The world religions and other faith traditions, given actual conditions, clearly are not ready to come to a unity of fusion. The unity that interfaith dialogue should seek is possible only in collaboration.

If the organizations active in interreligious/intercultural dialogue and in dialogue for peace really believe what they say they believe, then the most direct and efficient way to realize a one-voice world forum for all faith communities, the object of the United Religions Initiative, would be for the main interfaith and peace organizations (e.g., the Parliament of

the World's Religions, the World Conference of Religions for Peace, the World Congress of Faiths, the International Association for Religion and Peace, and many others in Southeast Asia) to transcend their self-interests and join forces with the United Religions Initiative in a kind of federal combination. Then they could work to create this kind of global organization, whose most appropriate name would be the United Religions Organization, as a worthy collaborating partner to the United Nations. This would be the expression, reverberating throughout the world, of a real human spirit of mutual love and compassion, and also of the Japanese and Eastern spirit of harmony in forgetting the "self" for the common welfare.