

**CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN A MULTI-RELIGIOUS WORLD:  
recommendations for a code of conduct**

**BACKGROUND**

1. In today's world there is more collaboration among Christians and among followers of other religions. The PCID and WCC have a history of such collaboration. This document is a result of that collaboration.
2. In recent years there have been increasing inter-religious tensions, some of it occasioned by what is perceived by some as unethical means of evangelism. Christian mission, particularly the issue of conversion, has sometimes caused pain to other religious communities.
3. In response to this, the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue (PCID) and the WCC Office on Inter-religious Dialogue and Cooperation (IRDC) decided to address the issues envisaging a joint process called "*Inter-religious Reflection on Conversion: From Controversy to a Shared Code of Conduct.*" They invited the World Evangelical Alliance to join as a partner in this process and they participated.
4. Two consultations, an inter-religious consultation on *Assessing the Reality* in Lariano, Italy, and an intra-Christian consultation, in Toulouse, France were held in 2006 and 2007, respectively. We, the above mentioned partners representing the largest Christian families of faith (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal) met for a third conversation and produced this document.
5. Aware that we are dealing with complex definitions, the meanings we intend appear in a glossary below together with indications of where to find our institutional definitions.
6. We invite churches, local, national and regional church councils and mission agencies to use the recommendations in this document to prepare their own code of conduct for their witness in a multi-religious world. We hope that Christians across the world will use this document to evaluate their own practices in witnessing to their faith in Christ, both by word and deed.

**THEOLOGICAL BASIS**

1. Christians affirm that it is our privilege and joy to "give account for the hope that is within us" but we do so with "gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15)
2. Religious freedom is a right which flows from the very dignity of the human person, grounded in the creation by God of all human beings in the image and likeness of God (cf. Genesis 1:26).
3. The teaching and example of Jesus Christ and that of the early church on mission must be our guide.(footnote references) For two millennia, Christians have tried to faithfully follow His instruction to preach the good news of God's reign to all people everywhere. Sometimes, and in some contexts, the

proclamation of the Gospel is difficult or even prohibited, yet witness to Christ must continue. (Matthew 28:19-20)

4. Christians affirm that while it is our responsibility to witness. Conversion is not our prerogative; it is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the individual.

## **PRINCIPLES**

As Christians we adhere to the following principles as we seek to fulfil Christ's commission to us:

1. **Imitating Jesus Christ.** As Christians in our witness we need to follow the example and teachings of Jesus Christ.
2. **Mutual respect.** We commit ourselves to working with those of other religions and people of goodwill in mutual respect, in harmony, and common action to build a better world.
3. **The rights of others.** We acknowledge that followers of other religions have also the right and the freedom to profess, practice and propagate their religion.
4. **Christian virtues.** We shall seek to conduct ourselves with charity and compassion, renouncing all forms of arrogance, boasting, superiority, condescension, and disparagement in our relationships with adherents of other religions.
5. **Incentives.** We condemn all forms of allurements, including financial incentives and rewards, which are manipulative means for the conversion of others. We shall offer our service to others out of concern for their well-being as people made in the image and likeness of God.
6. **Good in other religions.** We recognize the responsibility to acknowledge, preserve, and promote what is good and true, in the beliefs and practices of other religions.
7. **Respect for culture.** We shall strive to show respect for others through a desire to understand their language, history, traditions, and religion. We renounce the view that our own particular culture and expression of Christian life can be a universal norm.
8. **Rejection of violence and abuse of power.** Following the example of Jesus Christ we reject all violence and the abuse of power in our witness.
9. **Solidarity with the persecuted.** We recognise that in some countries, sometimes as a consequence of unethical missionary practices, our fellow believers are suffering discrimination and persecution. We stand by them in our prayers and encouragement. We shall do all we can to support them in their Christian witness and be a voice for the voiceless.
10. **Building inter-religious relationships.** Intentional relationship-building with people of different religions provides an opportunity for deeper mutual understanding and harmonious living in friendship and mutual respect. Genuine inter-religious relationships engender trust and enable confidence-building

measures that help alleviate tensions and foster reconciliation. To this end, we encourage Christians to work together with a shared vision and praxis of inter-religious relationships, and to pray for all their neighbours.

## **PROVISIONS**

### **A. Reception of new Christians**

1. We need to be attentive to the sensitivities and needs of new converts particularly when their lives are in danger.
2. We recognise that sometimes followers of other religions decide to follow Christ without leaving their religious communities and without formally joining a Christian church. Others have dual religious beliefs. We acknowledge that we must provide appropriate pastoral care for them.
3. We acknowledge that changing one's religion is a very profound step that should be preceded by time for adequate reflection and preparation during which time the person can freely consider his or her religious convictions and seek advice from whomever he or she wishes.

### **B. The family**

1. We maintain that people wishing to marry should not be forced to change their religious beliefs in order to marry. We acknowledge that we need to provide appropriate pastoral care to the families of individuals who have entered into cross-cultural and inter-religious marriages. We recognise that children of inter-religious marriages may be confused about their religious identity and may therefore need particular pastoral care.

### **C. Acts of charity**

1. Acts of charity including education, health care and relief services should arise from the unconditional love of Christ and should never be tied to conversion by force, allurements or persuasion. The exploitation of poverty and need has no place in Christian outreach. We acknowledge that our Christian social work, ministered in a spirit of love and compassion, can lead to the inner transformation of people and even to their conversion. We must let our light so shine before others that both our words and our works speak the Gospel, but they should not be used as enticement to convert.
2. While ministries of healing, are an integral part of the Gospel, those who engage in these ministries in a multi-religious context require particular discernment and, exercise the ministry in such a way as to ensure that the vulnerability of people and their need for healing is not exploited.

### **D. Honesty and Respect**

1. In our inter-religious encounters we should speak honestly, respectfully, and authentically. We should approach them each other with willingness to listen and understand each other's beliefs and practices. Any mutual criticism and challenge should have as its goal the up-building of mutual understanding in friendship.

2. In our inter-religious encounters, we affirm the need to speak in truth and charity and, where deemed appropriate, critically about the beliefs and practices of others. But in doing so, we undertake not to (1) adopt disrespectful, condescending, and ridiculing language in our criticisms, (2) compare disparagingly the practices of other religions with the ideals of the Christian faith, (3) criticize other religions if we have not attempted to understand them, (4) criticize other religions without providing constructive alternatives, (5) be critical of other religions without also being self-critical and being open to receive the criticism of religious others.

## **GLOSSARY** (still to be drafted)

Evangelisation

Conversion

On-going conversion

Proselytism

Dialogue

Proclamation

Witness

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The representatives of the largest Christian families of faith (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal) that came together to prepare this document commend to our churches in local, national and regional settings this spirit of ecumenical working together, in particular in inter-religious contexts.
2. Recognizing the particularity of each context, we suggest that local churches, confessional bodies, local, national and regional bodies and mission agencies, formulate their own code of conduct of witness, in the light of this document.
3. Building friendships with people, including those of other religions, is a Christ-like way of living. When such relationships exist at institutional levels between churches, ecclesiastical organizations and other religious communities the infrastructure necessary for dealing with inter-communal tensions and conflict is already in place. We recommend that such relations are built at all levels.
4. Growth in Christian faith, and strengthening one's self-understanding and identity is very necessary in particular in this multi-religious world. As a part of that formation, Christians must receive accurate knowledge about other religions.
5. In contexts where years of tension and conflict have created deep suspicions and breaches of community, inter-religious dialogue can provide new opportunities for resolving conflicts, healing of memories, and creating structures for reconciliation and peace-building. We recommend that churches engage in such inter-religious dialogues.