

## Resources

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A resource list may be ordered from the PC(USA) Office of Interfaith Relations or downloaded from the PC(USA) web site <[www.pcusa.org/wmd/eir](http://www.pcusa.org/wmd/eir)>.

"The Church of Jesus Christ is the provisional demonstration of what God intends for all of humanity."

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
Book of Order G-3.0200

"True witness follows Jesus Christ in respecting and affirming the uniqueness and freedom of others."

"The Spirit of God is constantly at work in ways that pass human understanding . . . In entering into a relationship of dialogue with others, therefore, Christians seek to discern the unsearchable riches of God and the way (God) deals with humanity."

"Witness cannot be a one-way process, but of necessity is two-way; in it Christians become aware of some of the deepest convictions of their neighbors. It is also the time in which, within a spirit of openness and trust, Christians are able to bear authentic witness, giving an account of their commitment to the Christ, who calls all persons to himself."

WCC, Mission and Evangelism:  
An Ecumenical Affirmation

"We are counseled, 'Always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence' (1 Pet. 3:15). As we do so, we struggle and work together with others because Christian witness embraces bringing healing and wholeness to a world torn apart by rivalries and wars, social disparities and economic injustices."

WCC, Guidelines for Relations with  
People of Other Religions

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# GUIDELINES

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## FOR

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## INTERFAITH

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## DIALOGUE

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**I**t is Christian faith in the triune God — Creator of all humankind, Redeemer in Jesus Christ, revealing and renewing Spirit — which calls Christians to human relationship with our many neighbors. Such relationships include dialogue: witnessing to our deepest convictions and listening to those of our neighbors. Christian faith sets us free to be open to the faiths of others, to risk, to trust, and to be vulnerable. In dialogue, conviction and openness are held in balance.

Dialogue is not only an activity of meetings and conferences. It is also a way of living out Christian faith in relationship to those with whom we share towns, cities, nations, and the earth. Together we can be in common pursuit of justice, peace, and action for the good of all.

Neighbors may be partners in common social, economic, and political crises and quests; companions in intellectual and spiritual exploration; or, literally, the people next door.

Through encounters with neighbors of other religious traditions, many Christians become aware of a “common humanity” before God. This experience is rooted in the biblical affirmation that God is the creator and sustainer of all creation.

Dialogue must be a process of mutual empowerment, not a negotiation between conflicting interests and claims. It is the task of interreligious relations and dialogue to help prevent religion from becoming the fault line between communities. In some places, Christians and the church as an institution are in positions of power and influence, and their neighbors are without power. In other places it is the Christians who are powerless. There are also situations of tension and conflict where

dialogue may not be possible or opportunities very limited. Especially where communities become identified exclusively by their religion, situations become explosive.

Bonds of relationship with those considered “the other” are not built easily or quickly. The tenacity to go on, even when the fruits are not obvious, is one of the basic disciplines of dialogue.

- **Churches should seek ways in which Christian communities can enter into dialogue.** They should also discover ways of responding to similar initiatives by their neighbors. Whenever possible, churches should participate ecumenically, in cooperation with one another.
- **Dialogues should normally be planned together.** They may focus on particular issues: theological or religious, political or social. They need clear objectives, commonly agreed criteria for participation, and regular assessment.
- **Dialogues should be informed by their concrete setting.** They should not aim to remove or run away from differences but to build confidence across them. Awareness of history, economic backgrounds, and political ideologies is essential; cultural, gender, generational, racial, and ethnic differences all have an impact on interactions. Only by being alert both to areas of tension and discrimination and to opportunities for conversation and cooperation in their own context will Christians and their neighbors be able to create the conditions for dialogue.
- **Dialogue partners should be allowed to define themselves,** thereby enabling

informed understanding of each other. Participants should describe and witness to their faith in their own terms. Self-serving descriptions of other people’s faith are a root of prejudice, stereotyping, and condescension. Nevertheless, dialogue partners should recognize that any religion claiming universality will have its own interpretations of other religions as part of its self-understanding. Dialogue gives an opportunity for mutual questioning of understandings partners have about themselves and others.

- **Dialogue should respect the integrity of each religious tradition’s own structures.** In particular, participants should recognize the differing ways they define their relation with their own communities. Some will affirm their right and obligation to speak for their community; others will speak from their personal experience alone.
- **Dialogue should generate educational efforts.** In many cases Christians must take the initiative, working to restore the distorted image of neighbors who may already exist in their communities. Even where Christians do not live in close contact with people of various religious traditions, they should take seriously the responsibility to learn.
- **Partners in dialogue should be aware of cultural loyalties.** Though a culture should neither be romanticized nor made into a false absolute, it may often challenge and enrich expressions of faith. Christian dialogue partners often engage in “internal dialogue” that reflects upon issues in the encounter of the gospel with cultural and ideological factors in various communities where Christians find

themselves and with the ideological assumptions of Christians themselves.

- **Dialogue should be collaborative, cooperative, and inclusive — its participants pursuing common enterprises in community.** Christians and their neighbors will be able to help each other break out of isolation in order to realize a more participatory society. Common enterprises may generate interreligious committees.
- **Dialogue is most vital when its participants actually share their lives together.** Where people of different religions share common activities, intellectual interests, and spiritual quests, dialogue can be related to the whole of life. The person who asks a neighbor of another faith to explain the meaning of a custom or festival has actually taken the first step. Of course, dialogue between long-term neighbors may also need to reckon with deeply ingrained suspicions.
- **Dialogue includes extending and accepting invitations to visit each other as guests and observers** in family and community rituals, ceremonies, and festivals. Human communities express and renew themselves in ritual and worship. Working together in common activities or visiting homes and festivals will eventually raise the difficult question of fuller sharing in common prayer, worship, or meditation. Dialogue partners must face the assumptions and implications of what they will choose to do or not do together.

*Based upon World Council of Churches guidelines on dialogue, 1979 and 2002.*