

*Striving together in dialogue:
A Muslim-Christian call to reflection and action*

In late 2000, the paper “Striving Together in Dialogue: A Muslim-Christian Call to Reflection and Action” was authored by Christians and Muslims together, as an outcome of a series of international dialogues facilitated over the span of a decade by the World Council of Churches.

A. History

The relationship between Christians and Muslims has long concerned U.S. Presbyterians. In the past, we heard stories from the small number who, through participation in world mission, enjoyed deep life experiences in various parts of the Muslim world. Other Presbyterians living far from Muslims asked questions about Islam, often out of frustration at the seeming resistance of Muslims to Christian witness or out of concern for the situation of Christian minorities living in predominantly Muslim areas.

In time, expanded world travel brought more church members into direct contact with Muslims and with Christians living in the Islamic world. Additionally, the number of Muslims in the United States increased greatly through immigration and conversion. In response, our church’s mission entities established an “Islamic Study” whose report to the 199th General Assembly (1987) led to affirmation of our witness in word and deed among Muslims and adoption of recommendations including calls for increased knowledge of Muslims, cooperative efforts between Muslims and Christians, and work toward religious freedom and equality of citizenship for all persons in their own societies (Minutes, 1987, Part I, pp. 492–94).

Deepened interest in relating to U.S. Muslims resulted in action such as a 1992 African American consultation in northern California that was mutually planned and carried out by Muslims and an ecumenically inclusive group of Christians with assistance from the PC(USA) (reported in Church & Society, Sept/Oct 1992).

Later, the 205th General Assembly (1993) commended for reflection and implementation an ecumenical document written by Christians for Christians, Issues in Christian-Muslim Relations [ICMR], which outlined some of the major concerns between people of the two faiths (Minutes, 1993, Part I, pp. 839–44).

With the major attacks of September 11, 2001, a heightened sense of consciousness of Islam and of Muslims has arisen among non-Muslims around the world. The almost unthinkable use of commercial aircraft to carry out the missions, the targeting of buildings symbolic of finance and the military, the availability of the mass media to disseminate images, the loss of lives—all of these have created an impact that some liken to the Holocaust in effect, different as the two historic events are in almost every respect. That is, just as the Holocaust exposed the terrible depths of Christian Europe’s attitudes towards Jews, so the September 11 events reveal the incalculable need for reconciliation between Muslims and Christians in the face of centuries of mutual historical wrongs. (For Holocaust comparison, see Church of Pakistan Bishop

Manowar Rumalshah's presentation to a World Council of Churches [WCC] consultation, Nov. 30, 2001.)

B. A Current Reflection

While the events of September 11 exceeded the imaginations of almost everyone, there were those who realized that, in spite of advances in relationships between some Christians and Muslims, there were major problems. A paper, *Striving Together in Dialogue: A Muslim-Christian Call to Reflection and Action* (prepared in late 2000 as an outcome of a series of WCC-facilitated international dialogues over a decade and now being used globally) warned that “current developments, political and otherwise, may be threatening to build up new attitudes of distrust and hostility.” It went on to urge, “This imposes a new urgency in the consideration of Christian-Muslim relations . . .” (paragraph. 9).

This remarkably prescient document was authored by Christians and Muslims, a recognition in practice of the statement made in ICMR, “We can no longer speak as if Muslims are not listening. Everything we say and do must be in the knowledge that they are partners, whether directly or indirectly. Dialogue and collaboration cannot bear fruit unless it is two-way.”

The paper reminds readers that “conflicts overshadow peaceful experiences and accusations drown the voices of understanding” (paragraph 2)—especially important to recognize when people feel they have been failed by the institutions of society, including government, and in consequence turn to religious affiliation as the sole meaningful identifier in their lives. When this happens, differences between peoples become intensified and people are pigeonholed along religious lines. Since September 11, many local U.S. churches have sought to avert this danger in our own nation. They have reached out to Islamic centers or have responded to the outstretched hands extended from the local Muslim community. Interfaith events have been widespread; and Christians concerned about the civil liberties of Muslim neighbors have undertaken acts of accompaniment and advocacy; and many educational events have occurred. But, on a global level, violence has been met by armed force, and Americans—having heard the references to Islam made by the aggressors in the September 11 attacks—are left asking, Is this a religious conflict? The answer requires attention not only to religious identity but also to other aspects of contemporary society.

Islam stresses that, because God is Lord of the universe, every aspect of the believer's life is to be submitted to God, including economic, political, social, and spiritual life. The seamless integration of these makes the distinctions used by most Americans—of sacred and secular, religious and political—little help in explaining Islam from the outside. Yet it remains important for American Christians to reflect upon what aspects of current events are motivated by Islamic tenets and what may represent political use of the Islamic label for purposes of power or oppression.

Viewed from the long sweep of history, American Christians can begin to see Muslims and Christians caught in cyclical images of domination and humiliation, each being affected by the status of the other, the humiliation of one being identified as the success of the other. They will discover that Muslims were once successful competitors with other empires, including the

Christian Byzantines, but they now see themselves as humiliated by the indignities colonization and globalization have brought in many parts of the world. They will learn that many Muslims understand the West to be the “Christian world,” a mirror of the “Islamic world” in a worldview that recognizes societies as having religious or ideological identity.

As U.S. Christians study, we will need to learn the significant dynamics of majority-minority relationships—in the U.S. or India, where Muslims are a minority; in Pakistan, Iran, or Malaysia, where Muslims are a majority; and in Sudan, Nigeria, or Indonesia, where one section of a country vies with another in the face of different majority-minority relationships in different geographic regions. Additionally, U.S. Christians will need to give more attention to the interplay between our relationships with Muslims living in our nation and those elsewhere; both express hurt when U.S. government policies and interactions in American society affect Muslims anywhere adversely.

C. Contacts, Hospitality, Reconciliation

There are at least 1,200 mosques in the U.S., with an average of roughly 1,600 people associated with each. Four-fifths are in urban-suburban areas, with suburban mosques experiencing the greatest growth. These places of Muslim activity attract an average of sixteen persons per mosque as converts each year (figures from *The Mosque in America* report, April 2001, by Ihsan Bagby, et al., Council on American-Islamic Relations).

Presbyterians have learned that, at the congregational level, the encounter and hospitality through which reconciliation comes often best begins by one person taking the role of making the long-term contacts that establish trust sufficiently to start building bridges. (See *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue: Facets of a Relationship*, section 4.B.) We can remember that there are multiple ways in which the church acts as a sign and means toward the unity God seeks for all people—work toward reconciliation, service with and for the oppressed and needy, and evangelization. (See *Presbyterian Church in the U.S.*, 1978 General Assembly.) We can pray that God will bless all of these and that, in the spirit of the 199th General Assembly (1987) action, we can be motivated by a desire to love God, to love our neighbors, and—with faith in the sovereign God—to seek a future “free from hatred, free from fear, and directed by hopeful love.”

ACTION OF THE 214TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly adopted the following recommendations of the General Assembly Council (GAC), and its Worldwide Ministries Division (WMD):

1a. Commend to Presbyterians the document, *Striving Together in Dialogue: A Muslim-Christian Call for Reflection and Action*, for study and reflection.

1b. Commend to Presbyterians the following PC(USA) document: *Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Jesus Christ’s Way*, along with the three pamphlets, *Christians and Muslims*, *Presbyterian Principles for Interfaith Dialogue*, and *Witness and Evangelism Among People of Other Faiths*, to resource our dialogue with Muslims.

- 2. Urge middle governing bodies, congregations, and individuals to relate to those Muslims in their own localities who are interested in building bridges of understanding and trust, doing so ecumenically whenever possible; and request the GAC to provide resources to assist these efforts.**
- 3. Request the GAC, through WMD, to give attention to the dynamics of Islamic-Christian relations around the world through participation with partner churches and other PC(USA) partners in dialogical efforts, where possible, and, where local situations make this impossible, to act with partners (churches) in awareness of their interreligious situations.**
- 4. Urge solidarity with people of all ethnic and religious traditions who face discrimination in response to world events and the perceived interests of the U.S.**

Striving Together in Dialogue

American Christians and Muslims will find much in “Striving Together in Dialogue” that will inform their thinking after the events of September 11, 2001, even though the document’s writing precedes that date. The document is the product of an international Muslim-Christian meeting held in Amersfoort, Netherlands, in November 2000, convened by the World Council of Churches (WCC), that took stock of various WCC initiatives in formal Christian-Muslim dialogue during the preceding decade. Over that time, Christian and Muslim religious leaders, educators, and activists from a variety of countries discussed together the thorny and sometimes divisive issues of religion, law and society, human rights, religious freedom, community rights, mission and da’wa (that is, call, invitation, missionary outreach), and communal tensions. This document draws largely on their questions, reflections, and conclusions.

The document has been published and distributed by both the World Council of Churches and Islamic organizations, as well as specialized journals, with the hope that it might be widely circulated and used in discussions and educational programs.

A. The History of Dialogue: Taking Stock

1. The last three decades have seen many efforts, some of them concerted, towards a new understanding between Christians and Muslims. They are noticeable in the broad areas of dialogue, education, and scholarship. Christian-Muslim relations were historically marked by confrontation. The change, it is often claimed, did not occur until Christians, in the West more particularly, were willing and able to rethink their relations with Islam and the Muslim world. The development of ecumenism, the critical re-examination of Christian mission, and the awareness of increasingly being pluralist societies—some formerly “Christian”—account primarily for a new call to dialogue. Past exchanges between Muslims and Christians are depicted as polemical, if they are even acknowledged.

2. While it is true that the complex history of Christian-Muslim relations has known much rivalry and war, it is often forgotten that there were rich and fertile encounters in the realms of life and ideas alike. Unfortunately, one of the features of our historical memories has been the way in which conflicts overshadow peaceful experiences and accusations drown the voices of

understanding. Something similar happens at the level of religious views, when perceptions of difference displace common or shared principles.

3. Traditional universes were self-contained. Exclusivist and reductionist attitudes towards other religions prevailed. Nevertheless, Islamic history bears witness, especially during the formative phase of Arab-Islamic civilization, to a remarkable ability to invite and integrate the various contributions that Christians were eager and able to offer. Active in transmitting and developing knowledge, in the various fields of science and philosophy, Christians could also engage in dialogue on matters of revelation and reason, not only as apologists. Despite varying social and material constraints, contacts between people, exchanges, and collaboration were never broken.

4. In modern times and in many countries, emerging national identities, rooted in cultural bonds, strengthened by an awareness of common interests and destiny, and shaped by the rules of a new political order, brought Muslims and Christians closer to each other. New relationships transcended traditional barriers. They were distinct from those based on religious affiliation without necessarily contradicting them. These relationships sometimes gave primacy to national solidarity and minimized the need for interreligious dialogue. In some quarters it was feared that religious identity, made explicit in dialogue, might threaten national unity.

5. At the global level, the process of national liberation and decolonization tended to favor a more equitable relationship between Christians and Muslims, thus creating better conditions for a meaningful interreligious and intercultural dialogue. In conjunction with these developments, religious worldviews interacted with universalist and humanist ideas, demonstrating a greater sensitivity to the spreading reality of religious plurality. Christians, for their part, had to address this reality, defining its significance for their own self-understanding. Optimistic in character, this response gave birth to ideas that, during the 60s and 70s of the twentieth century, led to authoritative church texts and various types of guidelines on dialogue. Likewise, many Muslims upheld the idea of dialogue and participated actively in various initiatives. They emphasized the Qur'anic call to dialogue and, in some cases, suggested that the Muslims need to be leading partners in responding to this call.

6. At the same time, dialogue generated controversies. To be sure, opposition was not confined to theological positions and to an assessment of the legitimacy and value of dialogue. It extended to the identification of partners, issues for discussion, and areas of common action. Dialogue was faced with both resistance and hesitation. The expectation that a traditional self-understanding be rethought and liberated from the grip of history was not universally met. Nor could Muslims disregard the past, with all its conflicts and misperceptions, and espouse trust instead of suspicion of the churches' intentions towards them. In addition, changes in economic, political, and cultural power relations were not sufficient to ensure that dialogue be taken in the sense it is intended: free from partisan interest and critical of the domination of one partner over the other.

7. Among the many objections to, and reservations towards, dialogue, five particular ones are worth being underlined. There are those who insist that the local context of communal relations in a given society often makes broader dialogue irrelevant. Others suggest that dialogue

may function as a cover for unequal power relations or as an ornament, concealing purposes different from those stated. There are also those who are weary of controversy and tend to be apprehensive of any mutual inquiry and questioning. Fourthly, one finds those who see dialogue as compromising the truth and a betrayal of the divine call to mission or da'wa. A fifth position argues that dialogue is, on the contrary, a more sophisticated form of mission or, even if that is not the intention of its initiators, leading to mission.

8. Objections to dialogue are often aggravated further by questions regarding the representativeness of participants. Dialogue is readily dismissed by its opponents as elitist or marginal because the people involved are said to be unrepresentative. The question of representativeness is bound to that of effectiveness. Partners in dialogue may be expected to commit their communities, especially when they seem to identify strongly with them. But this ignores the fact that churches, and even more their Muslim counterparts, seldom function as centralized institutions. They do not realistically claim undisputed authority over the faithful, especially when matters such as interreligious relations are at stake. When partners in dialogue rightly point out that their influence is limited, their efforts may be seen as irrelevant. But at least symbolically, they continue to be seen as responsible for attitudes prevailing in their communities, even if they chose to be critical of them.

9. It is needless to repeat that current developments, political and otherwise, may be threatening to build up new attitudes of distrust and hostility. This imposes a new urgency in the consideration of Christian-Muslim relations and priorities on dialogue and cooperation. The patient work of recent decades is a reliable resource. Its value cannot be quantified, but this does not mean that it bears no fruits. Countless local, national, and international experiences confirm this. Participants have discovered that interreligious dialogue is informed by, and informs, the internal dialogue within each religion. What was learned in the last decades lays the foundation for a continuing dialogue that is both hopeful and takes account of the contemporary realities.

B. The Current Situation: Threats and Opportunities

10. Relations between Muslims and Christians are usually strongly influenced by local and regional histories and events. But broader developments also have a significant impact, especially when they contribute to destabilizing societies previously characterized by peaceful relations of mutual acceptance. In situations where uncertainties of change begin to be felt, suspicion and fear can build up between communities leading to tension and possibly conflict.

11. It seems clear that in some parts of the world, the traditional nation state model is subject to growing questioning. Some countries have fallen apart, others are constructing larger entities. States have become too small for some purposes and too large for others. In many post-colonial independent countries, nation-building projects remain incomplete, become fragile, or are failing. The borders set by the imperial powers, while mostly unchanged, could not gain universal acceptance. In some cases, they are disputed. Claims to common nationhood have been countered by the fact that ethnic, cultural, and linguistic communities straddle sometimes several state boundaries while contributing to divisions within them. National governments are often far from having succeeded in delivering on promises of genuine national independence and social and economic advancement. Indeed, in many instances, early progress has gone into reverse and

large sections of the national population have sunk deeper into poverty. Official rhetoric of development, national unity, democracy, and human rights often contrasted with different realities on the ground. For such reasons, political institutions often lack legitimacy.

12. The continuing globalization of economic processes, and of information, is associated with increases in human mobility through migration, refugee movements, and the growth of transnational networks. Local cultural identity is threatened. This often further weakens the state and adds to the pressures on national and regional loyalties. New relations between people across traditional ties and webs of interests have created new loyalties and identities in which local community has little meaning.

13. When states become weak, people are thrown back on reliance on traditional community structures and identities for meaning and material security. Conversely, when a state becomes oppressive, people find protection in traditional community structures and identities. In both cases, the effects of globalization leading to greater cultural uniformity invite, in many cases, a search for specificity and distinction. Such a search favors an affirmation of traditional cultural and religious identities.

14. Everywhere, “meaningful” identities are multiple and will vary depending on particular needs. Professional and economic security may be found in one form of community (e.g. trade union or professional association), daily social networks in another (e.g. neighborhood, factory, club), social and political activity in yet another (e.g. neighborhood, factory, club), social and political activity in yet another (e.g. party, women’s groups), and spiritual search again in another (e.g. religious and worshiping community). But when all such various needs are being met or expressed in one identity, the borders between communal loyalties are mutually reinforced rather than being mutually balanced. Boundaries between oneself and the other are strengthened. They create closed communities within which common and exclusive memories can be developed and activated, the self and stranger are stereotyped and the latter is easily demonized.

15. In such cases, differences in community size become an issue of minority threatened by majority. Insecure communities in one place seek alliances with others elsewhere, perceived to share a common identity, in order to achieve political empowerment. External attention to, and support for, “minority rights” is thus invited. They can be used as a pretext for self-interested intervention by foreign powers. National governments and political movements that are part of “majority” communities that see themselves as threatened by such interventions, see their suspicion towards “minorities” justified and deepened. At the same time, some governments strengthen their power by managing communities and relations between them, exploiting mutual fears, mobilizing one against the other, and recruiting some in support and thus further undermining the security of others.

16. When communities identify themselves or are identified exclusively by their religion, situations become more explosive. Religion speaks for some of the deepest feelings and sensitivities of individuals and communities, it carries deep historical memories, often appeals to universal loyalties, especially in the case of Christianity and Islam. And so religion comes to be

seen as the cause of conflict and is often in fact an intensifier of conflicts whose causes are outside religion.

17. Such developments in recent decades have, however, coincided with developments in the religious arena. In many regions, what had been thought of as an irreversible process of secularization has been countered by a “return” of religion into public life. An increased political and social visibility of religion was noticeable before the fall of the Soviet system and has strengthened as a result. In the West, the talk of “Islam, the new enemy,” and the “clash of civilizations” points to a certain perception of the role of religion in the public sphere and in international relations. In the Muslim world, religion has regained its vigor, in resistance to Western domination and as an affirmation of the rights of Muslims and their competence to contribute to the making of a new world.

18. As the experience of Christian-Muslim cooperation and mutual understanding grows and spreads, it begins to offer a prospect of counteracting processes that tend to globalize conflicts that involve Muslims and Christians. There are cases where a conflict in one place, with its local causes and character, is perceived and instrumentalized as part of a conflict in another, with its separate and specific causes and character. So enmities in one part of the world spill over into situations of tension in other regions. An act of violence in one place is used to confirm stereotypes of the “enemy” in another place or even provoke revenge attacks elsewhere in the world.

19. Muslim and Christian leaders and activists in dialogue, are intensifying their efforts to “de-globalize Christian-Muslim tensions.” They constantly warn against essentialism and sensationalism and draw attention to the specific local causes of conflicts, whose solutions can be found, first and foremost, in addressing those local causes. They refuse to be drawn into others’ conflicts on the basis of uncritical response to calls for solidarity and instead help to apply common principles of peace, justice, and reconciliation. They can thus help parties to local conflicts to release Islam and Christianity from the burden of sectional interests and self-serving interpretations of beliefs and convictions. Christian and Islamic beliefs and convictions can then constitute a basis for critical engagement with human weakness and defective social and economic orders, in a common search for human well-being, dignity, social justice, and civil peace.

20. It is needless to repeat that a culture of peace among religious communities is grounded in the culture of dialogue. The decades of dialogue between Muslims and Christians, at all levels, have strengthened relationships between the two religions, both individually and institutionally. Extensive personal networks of friendship and trust have been created through dialogue in the midst of conflicts labeled Christian-Muslim, making joint efforts for peace and justice both imperative and realistic. Growing mutual knowledge and interest in a greater understanding are replacing simplistic and uninformed stereotypes. Theological training and religious studies are beginning to include the other in their searching. Although there is clearly a long way to go, the fact of such beginnings gives reason for hope. It is a significant resource for future action.

21. The increasing participation of women in society has mobilized many women into Muslim-Christian cooperation in projects of development and social justice. The experiences of

“the dialogue of life,” where women play a leading role, cannot be separated from the broader dialogue and joint action of Christians and Muslims. In the longer term, the massive expansion of women’s participation in higher education, including religious education, suggests a progressively growing challenge to traditional patterns of thinking and structures of power. Such challenge is an essential contribution to the future of dialogue.

C. Renewing Common Affirmations

22. In a world where Christians and Muslims live as neighbors and co-citizens, dialogue is not only an activity of meetings and conferences. It is a way of living out our faith commitment in relation to each other, sharing as partners common concerns and aspirations, and striving together in response to the problems and challenges of our time. Widely accepted guidelines for genuine dialogue need to be re-emphasized and reaffirmed. A number of common affirmations are to be renewed taking stock of the previous experience and in the light of a Christian-Muslim appraisal of the current situation.

23. Differences are inherent in the human condition and a manifestation of divine wisdom. In recognition of such differences, interreligious dialogue is based on mutual respect and understanding. It should not be used for a theological debate in which adherents of each religion try to prove religious truth at the expense of the other.

24. Partners involved in interreligious work are not required to compromise on any of their basic religious beliefs in order to engage in a constructive dialogue. Much of the significance of dialogue between Muslims and Christians depends on its ability to engage those who are faithful to their respective religions and rooted in their communities. Dialogue is motivated by a religious vocation and is founded on religious values.

25. In dialogue, the deepest meaning of what our Scriptures say to us is opened up and speaks anew. Christians are motivated by the teaching that God wills love of neighbor inseparably from the love of God, which is shown in human action through love of others (Luke 10:27; Rom. 13:9–10; Gal. 5:15; John 4:20–21). Christ’s teaching of love includes all those we view as friends and those with whom we may feel enmity for any reason. Such love is not a mere sentimental emotion but an impetus to action (1 John 3: 18) and the basis of trust (1 John 4:18). Christians also recall that they are not to bear false witness against their neighbor (Ex. 20:16). In dialogue, they come to know their neighbors of other religions in ways that enable them to keep this commandment in fact, not simply through vague intention. “What does the Lord require of you” the prophet Micah asks, “but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

26. As Muslims enter dialogue, they recognize the Qur’anic texts concerning diversity and God’s purpose that say: “O people: we created you from a single [pair] of male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other” (49:13) and “We sent you solely as a mercy for all creatures” (21:07). Plurality is inscribed in God’s design: “To each among you have we prescribed a law and open way. If God has so willed, He would have made you a single people but [His plan] is to test you in what He has given you: so excel each other in good deeds; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which you dispute” (5:48).

Muslims are called to seek justice through their dialogue activities. The Qur'an teaches "Give just measures and weight; do not deprive others of their due" (7:85) and "O you who believe! Stand out firmly for God as witnesses for fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others turn you away from justice, be just: that is nearer to piety" (5:8).

27. Therefore, dialogue is not a negotiation between parties who have conflicting interests and claims. It should not be bound by the constraints of power relations. Rather, it needs to be a process of mutual empowerment of both Christians and Muslims towards their joint engagement in public concerns and their common pursuit of justice, peace, and constructive action on behalf of common good of all people. In this process, Muslims and Christians will draw on their spiritual resources.

28. With this perspective in mind, genuine dialogue implies a recognition of, and respect for, differences. At the same time, it seeks to discover and appreciate common values of Christianity and Islam. A fruitful mutual understanding cannot be enhanced unless both convergences and recognized differences are held in a creative relationship. This is equally true of debates within each religious community. Intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue depend on, and feed into, each other.

29. Appreciation of both diversity and commonalities can be achieved in dialogue as an educational process that enables each community to come to know better both the other and self. Muslims and Christians are thus helped to be critical of, and overcome, the many mutual stereotypes, prejudices, and misconceptions that serve to propagate suspicions and fear and justify exclusion.

30. But dialogue is not confined to communication or exchange of knowledge. It offers opportunities for interaction and practical engagement in matters of common concern at the grassroots level and in everyday life. Dialogue brings intellectual pursuits and life engagement into an integrated whole. The persuasiveness of the moral messages and the credibility of the intellectual pursuit necessarily depend on inclusive action on behalf of the common good.

31. In a context where religions are finding renewed public vigor, issues of freedom of conscience and human rights generally have re-emerged, in the last few years, as sensitive and even divisive. In this respect, Muslim dialogue has an indispensable contribution to make in affirming that the principles of human rights and religious freedom are indivisible. It is called to direct the forces of religiosity toward common good, instead of allowing them to breed intrareligious and interreligious hatred and conflicts. Muslims and Christians agree that freedom of conscience is essential to their respective faiths. But religious freedom does not only imply freedom of conscience but also the right to live in accord with religious values and the recognition of cultural and religious diversity as basic to human reality. More broadly, Christians and Muslims can contribute, through dialogue, to a discourse on human rights that can help reconcile the truly universal principles and the culturally specific claims. Such a discourse needs to be grounded in the respective religions to be genuinely inclusive and universal.

32. While recognizing that mission and da'wa are essential religious duties in both Christianity and Islam, Muslims and Christians need to uphold the spiritual and the material

well-being of all. Many missionary activities, and the methods they use, arouse legitimate suspicions. There are situations where humanitarian service is undertaken for ulterior motives and takes advantage of the vulnerability of people. Thus the clear distinction between witness and proselytism become crucial. It is the basis for the recognition that people of faith can enjoy the liberty to convince and be convinced and at the same time, respect each other's religious integrity, faithfulness to one's tradition and loyalty to one's community.

33. In dialogue, Muslims and Christians learn that Christianity and Islam are not two monolithic blocks confronting each other. They also learn that tensions and conflicts in various parts of the world are not an expression of a "clash of civilizations" nor do they define bloody borders between Christianity and Islam across the world. At the local level, dialogue can help diffuse, or even solve, problems that may otherwise be manipulated by external powers for their own purposes.

34. As Christians and Muslims understand justice to be a universal value grounded in their faith, they are called to take sides with the oppressed and marginalized, irrespective of their religious identity. Justice is an expression of a religious commitment that extends beyond the boundaries of one's own religious community. Moreover, Muslims and Christians uphold their own religious values and ideals when they take a common stand in solidarity with, or in defense of, the victims of oppression and exclusion. The logic of "reciprocity" in addressing minority rights contradicts the unconditional universality of the value of justice. People of faith should not allow themselves to be constrained by the methods of inter-state relations. The logic of reciprocity demarcates the world and societies along religious lines and contradicts principles of equal citizenship.

35. Women and men of faith, engaged in dialogue, affirm the equal citizenship of all persons within any given state or society, cutting across all ethnic, social and religious boundaries. Religious affiliations that unite people with others beyond their national borders need not contradict equal citizenship. Multiple identities are a fact of human existence. People define themselves in terms of various identities related—for example—to nation, religion, culture, family, gender, age, and work. In dialogue, no dimension of personal identity excludes another. The more dialogue partners feel secure in their own identities, the more they are able to be inclusive and engage in wider interreligious and intercultural relations and interaction.

D. Priorities for Action

36. Recommendations drawn during the many dialogue conferences that have been held in the last decade are often very similar. Their repetition may well purport to emphasize their importance and remind Christians and Muslims that the task before them continues to be unfinished. Against the background of assessing of the present state of Christian-Muslim relations attempted in this document, a few of those recommendations need to be highlighted and prioritized for further action. They concern partners in dialogue and structures of cooperation, education, and media.

37. In order to broaden its impact, Christian-Muslim dialogue needs to widen its participation and to reflect the diversity of opinions in each community. Moreover, the inclusion of students

and young peoples, religious leaders, various professional groups, and nongovernmental organizations should be encouraged.

38. Christians and Muslims are increasingly invited to participate in many intercultural, inter-religious, and international dialogue initiatives. While such participation may have a significant impact, it does not always mean acceptance of the underlying assumption of many such initiatives.

39. Christian-Muslim dialogue retains uniqueness and urgency, locally, regionally, and globally. It deserves to be the focus of continued attention and multiplied efforts. The cumulative experience acquired in this bilateral dialogue and the long-term engagement should be sustained beyond short-lived considerations and expediencies.

40. The strengthening and the creation of Christian-Muslim bodies at national and regional levels remains a priority. Such bodies should engage with civic and religious authorities in the pursuit of justice, equality of citizenship, human rights, and civil peace. They are called to play a leading role initiating planning and implementing dialogue and cooperation projects. They also have a particular responsibility in dealing with tensions and conflicts that affect Christian-Muslim relations, and in ensuring that problems specific to one context do not spill over into others. Christian-Muslim bodies and institutions should make efforts to learn from each other's experiences and develop ways of cooperation across regions.

41. Christians and Muslims should be encouraged to engage in joint study and research. They should involve academic and other bodies in developing guidelines for the preparation of textbooks and teaching materials that present authentic images of the other, correct misconceptions, and promote dialogue and good relations.

42. Educational programming in schools, colleges, universities, and adult education systems should be designed to enhance the understanding and appreciation of the various cultural and religious traditions of the world and should, whenever possible, invite adherents of those traditions to take part. This is particularly important when so many people are traveling into different cultures as tourists, professionals, business people, journalists, diplomats, non-government organization workers, etc. Teaching programs in theological and religious faculties and seminaries should prepare Christian and Muslim graduates with the training and sensitivity necessary for interreligious dialogue in a plural context.

43. Participants in Christian-Muslim dialogue should actively address the media and make a more creative use of the latest instruments of communication, such as the Internet. This will extend the participation, and awareness of, dialogue. It will also help counteract the effects of sensational, simplistic and stereotypical images and their manipulation.