

Resources

Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research, *Living Faithfully in the United States Today*. 2001.

Mitri, Tarek, ed., *Religion and Human Rights: A Christian-Muslim Discussion*. World Council of Churches, 1996.

National Council of Churches, *Interfaith Relations and the Churches*. A policy statement, 1999. PDS#74-292-99-005 or order from NCC interfaith office.

Parliament of the World's Religions. *Towards a Global Ethic (An Initial Declaration)*. 1993.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). *Human Rights Update* adopted yearly by the General Assembly. See G.A. minutes annually.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 208th General Assembly (1996). *Hope for a Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development* and Study Guide. PDS#OGA96-013.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 211th General Assembly (1999). *Building Community Among Strangers*. PDS#OGA99-028.

U.S. Conference of Religions for Peace. *Diversity and Community: A Multi-Religious Statement*. 2000.

Consult the Office of Interfaith Relations, (888)728-7228, for availability of statements above.

"Cooperation will help the churches manifest signs of unity among them necessary for a credible witness in our pluralistic world. It will also help them determine new common witness in ways appropriate to given local or international situations."

201st General Assembly, Christian-Jewish Relations

"Christians should use every opportunity to join hands with their neighbors, to work together to be communities of freedom, peace and mutual respect."

World Council of Churches, Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation (1982)

"The most fruitful interreligious relationships are likely to develop where persons of different faiths share concrete ethical concerns and can unite to put them into action. Religious disagreements should not become occasions for hatred and violence, or for unjust social relationships."

199th General Assembly, The Nature of Revelation

"In an attempt to avoid conflict concerning religion...we avoid addressing core elements about our own identity and that of others... Avoidance has seldom been a faithful form of Christian life."

211th General Assembly, Building Community Among Strangers



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INTERFAITH PARTICIPATION



The church must live out its mission in the world today with attention to our multiple relationships with others who claim spirituality, peoplehood, and meaning in their lives through identification with faith communities and faith traditions other than the Christian tradition. We are impelled in our relationships by the conviction that God wills humanity be one and that, through God's Spirit, the Church is a sign of this unity and a means toward it.

Several concerns affect our organizational involvements with other faiths.

1 The *Book of Order* (in G-15.0104-.0105) commits the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to relationships with other faiths, organizations, and movements in order that interests and concerns may be shared and common action undertaken where compatible means and aims exist. To assist in decision-making concerning participation, the 204th General Assembly (1992) adopted guidelines.

Suggestions for governing bodies and theological institutions about relating to organizations with people of other faiths:

- **Engage ecumenically in interfaith relationships**, insofar as possible. Enable various parts of the larger Christian community to meet communities of other religious faiths together. (Local churches engaging in direct congregation-to-congregation relationships with another faith community may follow the spirit of this guidance by presenting themselves most importantly as Christians, not simply as members of a particular church.)

- **Give attention to councils of churches that represent the Christian community** in interfaith relationships and that facilitate connections between Christians and people of other faiths.

- **Be aware of initiatives made by other appropriate organizations** and forums with which Christians may cooperate as they engage in interfaith relations.

- **Establish relationships with multifaith interreligious bodies** that have the following characteristics:

Their goals, grounded in spirituality, enable common work toward justice, peace, and the sustainability of creation

Their various member religious communities are able to participate fully in the organization's decision-making and dialogue activities

Each member religious group is able to maintain its own unique faith perspectives, without assuming these will merge into a new faith expression separate or different from the several communities and traditions represented

- **Take direct responsibility** in your church for enabling appropriate education, theological reflection, pastoral guidance, and advocacy that undergird and grow out of interfaith relationships.

2 As Christians seek to respect the cultural and religious diversity of others, we also wish to uphold the ethical values that we affirm as Christians. Such a dual approach requires uncommon moral wisdom. We can enhance this effort through work toward a global ethic – a provisional agreement on moral principles among people of different faiths that cuts across cultural, religious, and philosophical lines. Christians join the search for converging ethical standards as a response to the steadfast love of the Creator-Redeemer.

Suggestions for dialogue on a global ethic with people of other faiths:

- **Seek ethical values that provide a base** for mutual respect, compassion, and reconciliation.
- **Develop an ethic around justice, personal integrity, solidarity, and sustainability.** These values follow from common human claims seeking respect and esteem.
- **Work for norms that judge all** cultures, religions, and spiritualities.

3 American Christians' interfaith relationships are centered in the United States, but we also give attention to relations elsewhere. Both situations may involve issues of religious freedom. We are summoned to practice our own faith in ways that do not abridge the freedoms of others. When persecution is unleashed upon fellow Christians or upon other religious communities — or when privilege is granted to some and denied others — we may serve as advocates on behalf of the marginalized and oppressed.

Suggestions for participation of governing bodies and their members in the special concerns around human rights and religious freedom:

- **Cultivate solidarity among religious communities when any or all of them suffer.** Seek cooperation toward resolving conflict and developing common religiously-based approaches to human rights. Address issues of religious oppression or lack of freedom that result from particular societal forces or governmental practices.
- **Watch situations where conflict, violence, or human rights abuse involves religious identity** and Christians are one of the parties. Remember that religion itself may be used as an instrument in oppression and conflict. Identify with fellow Christians even when you are called to press them about their violation of rights of others.
- If planning to go to a conflict area of the world to visit members of another faith community, **inform local Christians.** Verify that, as part of the trip, it will be possible to visit local Christians freely.
- **Encourage United States and United Nations actions** on behalf of persecuted around the globe.
- **Pray for those who suffer for the practice of their faith.** The Sunday before Epiphany was designated by the General Assembly as a special day of prayer.

See General Assembly actions on which this content is based: Guidelines 1992, 1995; Religious Persecution 1995, 1997; Sustainable Development 1996; Principles, 1999.