

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

The Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group (IFTAG) is a theological group resourcing work across the churches of the four member nations in relation to issues of religious plurality. It is an advisory group of CTBI and reflects theologically on issues concerning the Churches' relationship to people of other faiths. These include

- Theological rationale for engaging in multi-lateral interfaith bodies
- Defensiveness as an aspect of religious identity
- The relationship between ecumenical and interfaith dialogue

CTBI has resources relating to interfaith dialogue. www.ctbi.org.uk/677

Common Concerns

The separation in the world is increasingly not between faiths and subdivisions of faith but between faith and the lack of it. How to respond to rapid social change while staying faithful to tradition is a challenge for all faiths.

Francis Campbell, British Ambassador to the Vatican 2005-11

The joint statement and challenge to national political leaders on climate change in September 2014 is an example of people from different faiths are acting together to express their views about their common anxieties. www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/joint-declarations/interfaith-statement-on-climate-change

What Can You Do?

Learn More

- Visit the EMBRACE Interfaith Understanding web page to learn more about other faiths and Christian attitudes towards interfaith dialogue www.embraceni.org/category/interfaith-understanding/
- Arrange to visit a place of worship. Contact information is available on the NI Inter-Faith Forum web site. <http://niinterfaithforum.org>
- Attend an event organised by the NI Inter-Faith Forum <http://niinterfaithforum.org>
- Find opportunities to have conversations with people of other faiths who are your neighbours or whom you meet in the community or at work.
- The Methodist Church in Britain resources contains ideas about how to start, and knowing what to say to people of other faiths. www.methodist.org.uk/mission/inter-faith-relations
- If they are happy to do so, parishes or congregations might consider asking somebody from another faith to explain their beliefs and practices to a small group, such as a Bible study group.
- They might also consider asking representatives from other faiths to attend a special occasion such as the installation of a new minister.

EMBRACE NI
Building a Welcoming Community



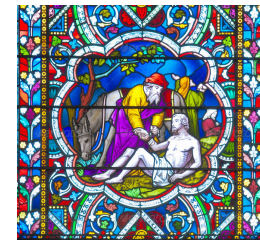
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EMBRACE Information Sheet 9

Interfaith Relationships

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A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

Luke 10: 30–34

When Jesus spoke about the importance of treating everyone as a neighbour he must have shocked his disciples by making the hero of his story an adherent of a religion they despised: a Samaritan. The recent rise in numbers of people living here who have come from other countries, has increased the number of residents who are members of faiths other than Christianity. Although the numbers remain very small, Christians need to consider how they should relate to these neighbours.

Numbers of People in Northern Ireland with Faith Affiliations

The 2011 census figures for N Ireland show that 40.5% of residents identified as Roman Catholic, 19% Presbyterian, 13.7% Church of Ireland, 3% Methodist, 5.76% members of other Christian or Christian related denominations and 10.1% indicated they were of no religion (There is further detail on the NI Interfaith Forum web site <http://niinterfaithforum.org/images/stories/Articles/DENOMINATIONAL%20STATISTICS%202013.pdf>.)

Only 0.08% of people identified with other world religions:

Islam (Muslim)	3,832	Hinduism	2,382 (+ 23 Hare Krishna)
Buddhism	1,046	Judaism	335
Bahá'í Faith	238	Sikhism	216
Chinese	35 (+ 51 Taoists)	Jain	24
Zoroastrian	15	Pagan	302 (+ 88 Wicca and 38 Druid)

(Nearly 180,000 people said they were not religious in the 2011 NI Census and 1,011 said they were Atheists, 740 Agnostics and 179 Humanists. Very small numbers identified with other religions / philosophies such as Spiritualism, Scientology or Heathen.)

Source: Norman Richardson (NI Interfaith Forum) <http://niinterfaithforum.org/images/stories/Articles/WORLD%20RELIGIONS%20-%20STATISTICS%202013.pdf>

What Do Churches Say about Interfaith Relationships?

Roman Catholic Church

The Catholic Church encourages interfaith dialogue at all levels:

A just appraisal of other religious traditions normally presupposes close contact with them. This implies ... practical experience of interreligious dialogue with the followers of these traditions. ... They command our respect because over the centuries they have borne witness to the efforts to find answers "to those profound mysteries of the human condition" ...

Dialogue and Proclamation, Vatican, 1991

This affirmation that God is the Father of all is therefore the theological foundation for the affirmation that it is not legitimate for anyone to espouse religious difference as a presupposition or pretext for an aggressive attitude towards other human beings.

Speaking notes of Most Revd. Diarmuid Martin Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland, Greenhills Ecumenical Conference, 2007

www.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/Greenhills%20Ecumenical%20Conference%20Press%20release.pdf

The Catholic Church in England and Wales has resources on relationships with other religions. www.cbcew.org.uk/CBCEW-Home/Departments/Dialogue-and-Unity/Other-Religions

Church of Ireland

The Church of Ireland House of Bishops has approved *Guidelines for Interfaith Events and Dialogue*. This booklet covers marriage, baptism, communion, funerals, church festivals and special sermons, festivals of other faiths, community events, schools and hospitality.

In relating to those of other faiths, it is important to create and develop relationships and understanding between people as individuals and as communities. ... We have Good News to share with the world (Matthew 28:19-20), and the gift of the Spirit to the Church (Acts 2:1-21) sends us out to meet people of all faiths, traditions and cultures. ...

Without dialogue between people of faith, the vacuum in communication and understanding can quickly and easily be filled by gossip, mistrust, prejudice, bigotry and racism. Bigotry is fed by fear and ignorance. Without dialogue and mutual respect, extremism and hatred can grow.

<http://ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/Information/Resources/CCU/interfaith.pdf>

The Methodist Church in Britain

The Methodist Church in Britain has resources, suggestions and stories about interfaith relations. www.methodist.org.uk/mission/inter-faith-relations

As we begin to engage in relations with people of other faiths, we find that our awareness of God at work in others' lives is sharpened. We also grow as Christians ourselves as we share our Christian faith.

www.methodist.org.uk/mission/inter-faith-relations/responding-to-our-calling

Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI)

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has no formal policy.

- People of all faiths and none should be fully respected; and are deserving of dignity and respect by virtue of their being created in the image of God.
 - We hold the right to religious freedom, practice and promotion.
 - We hold the importance of better understanding the sincerely held faith of others.
 - We welcome dialogue with people of other faiths and none; generally and on matters of mutual interest.
 - We cannot, in all conscience, engage in joint worship with other faiths.
- Comments by Rev Richard Kerr, (formerly PCI Race Relations Panel Convenor)

As Christians it is our duty to spread the love of God across Ireland to those whom we meet and with whom we come into contact, irrespective of nationality, race or creed, and be gracious in doing so.

Part of a Presbyterian statement in response to a controversial sermon by a pastor of another denomination. www.irishchurches.org/news/1594/respectful-relations

Evangelical Christians and Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue is currently experiencing a significant methodological shift where participants represent not only the liberal side of the faith spectrum, but also include conservatives with commitment to their respective religious traditions. This gradual shift ... is providing evangelical Christians an opportunity to engage in a field where encountering adherents of other religions is the primary objective. ... Not all will be equipped nor called to learn about the world's religions and engage in formal interfaith dialogue. Nevertheless, more evangelicals could prayerfully reflect upon their attitudes toward other religions and seriously consider seeking whether or not God is calling them to serve as evangelical voices in a field where there are so few to be found.

From 'Evangelicals and Interfaith Dialogue: A New Paradigm'
by Gina A. Bellofatto in *Lausanne World Pulse*, Oct. / Nov. 2014
www.lausanneworldpulse.com/1224?pg=all

World Council of Churches (WCC) and Ecumenism

The WCC has a project, Christian Self-Understanding Amid Many Religions www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/christian-self-understanding and publishes *Current Dialogue*, a magazine offering a platform for debate across religious divides. www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/current-dialogue-magazine

Contemporary understanding of 'ecumenism' obliges the Church to enter into dialogue with people of other faith traditions. If the Church's ecumenical mandate or vision is not only to bring unity and renewal of the whole Christian community, but also to embark on a worldwide mission and seek the unity of the whole human race, that is, the whole inhabited earth, then theology and theological education 'ought to be taught and done in relation to the people of other faiths, and ... take inter-religious dialogue seriously'.

Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Martey
www.oikoumene.org/en/folder/documents-pdf/WOCATI_2008_-_Presentation_on_INTER-RELIGIOUS_DIALOGUE__CATI_-_Emanuel_Martey.pdf