

PRAYER AND PRESENCE

Guidelines on inviting members of Other Faiths to Celebrations in Catholic Churches.

Increasingly, the question of welcoming leaders and members of Other Faiths to occasions of special celebration in our Cathedrals and Churches is becoming an issue. Crossing the threshold of another Faith's place of worship is always a solemn moment and in putting together some guidelines for the benefit of those involved in arranging such events, the Committee has drawn on the experience of those long accustomed to welcoming Other Faith leaders.

It is worth mentioning that we are often not invited back because some of the Other Faiths do not have comparable occasions on which to return the compliment.

The following basic ground rules may seem obvious, but need stating:

1. A formal invitation is needed, to respect the dignity of the leaders being invited. It is advisable to accompany certain invitations with a telephone call.
2. They need to be informed as to the exact nature of the service they are to attend and the reason for their invitation.
3. They need to be allocated places of honour at or near the front of the Church, and to be accorded the same dignity as other civic guests if they process in or out.
4. They need to be reassured that they may wear their traditional dress, need not remove hats or shoes, and will not be obliged to take part in any singing, praying, standing or kneeling unless they desire to do so.
5. They should be met at the door and escorted to their designated places by a Catholic who is known to them.
6. They should be supplied with clear copies of the liturgy or other text and, if possible, should be seated with members of the host community, who know them, can relate to them, are involved in the local Interfaith scene and who can be a source of reassurance to them, offering explanations where necessary.
7. They should be greeted formally by the presiding clergy. This greeting to include an introduction to the congregation with an outline of their role in the locality, their involvement in the local religious/Interfaith/social scene.
8. They should be made welcome to any reception held after the event and reassured that suitable food and drink will be provided but that they need not feel obligated to partake of this unless they feel comfortable in so doing. It will be necessary to have two or more tables where Vegetarians and Vegans

can find appropriate food; (awareness in regard to alcohol, pork, eggs and tobacco is called for).

9. Those invited may wish to bring their own food and drink. Often this can be an opportunity for Other Faiths guests to show their appreciation and such gestures of goodwill should be welcomed.
10. Christian hosts should be sensitive to the fact that Other Faith Communities place considerable emphasis on propriety and purity in matters of food and drink.
11. Because of the different types of celebrations, the time of year when the celebration is taking place, the needs and sensitivities of the Faith Communities involved, it is suggested that advice be sought by the organisers from an informed person, before each event.
12. It is advisable to research in advance which dates may be a source of difficulty for those to be invited. If the timing of the event cannot be altered, the invitation should be sent as planned but expressing acknowledgement of the difficulty involved, as a matter of courtesy.

Other areas to be aware of:

- a. Buddhist Monks may not be seated next to women.
Buddhists are always accompanied. Seating needs to be arranged.
- b. Avoid inviting Muslims on a Friday (or Jews on a Saturday).
It is noteworthy that Jewish leaders may come but stay in another room during the service.
- c. It is important to set aside a room where guests can dress in their robes, as appropriate.
- d. It is important to be sensitive to the presence of members of Other Faiths during the sermon and the speech at receptions and to emphasise what unites us.

On the question of *Communicatio in sacris* and common prayer, the formula which worked so well in Assisi is a useful one: **we come together to pray, not to pray together**. The presence of people of Other Faiths in no way invalidates the spiritual offering of the host community; rather, the experience of the several occasions when representatives from other Communities have been present has been one of welcome, acceptance and a deepening of friendship.

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