



CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS 'INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE'?

This chapter defines dialogue and explains how it is challenging, and how the search to understand others can enrich our own faith.

Summary: Interreligious dialogue takes place on every level of our lives with others. We engage in dialogue by simply being good neighbours and friends, we can work together on issues that concern us and our communities, we can try to understand and experience something of each others religious life and culture, or we can talk about our beliefs and spirituality.

Dialogue is about a journey to discover truth in what often seems strange and different and being open to being challenged and changed and surprised by what we find. When we engage with difference we can be helped to reflect more deeply on our own beliefs and our understanding of God.

Sometimes there are difficulties when people do not want to have dialogue with us or when we encounter something that is false. We may also find that others have a preconceived view of who we are. We need to be honest and say clearly and lovingly where we disagree.

Essential for dialogue is a mutual openness and a willingness to listen and learn. Both sides must be prepared to abandon preconceptions and presuppositions about the other and listen respectfully so that the other can reveal themselves without fear of judgement and misunderstanding.

Interreligious dialogue is:

- 'not so much an idea to be studied as a way of living in positive relationship with others' (Pope John Paul II 1990)
- 'a frame of mind, an attitude' (cf. "Meeting God in Friend and Stranger, p13)
- Simply living as good neighbours
- Working together in matters of common concern
- Trying to understand and experience something of each other's religion
- Recognising the presence of what is true and holy in other religions
- Reflecting on theological and spiritual matters
- Engaging with difference
- Being open to finding truth and goodness in other religions
- Being prepared to be challenged, surprised and changed by what we find
- Discerning between what is good and true and what is false
- Abandoning presuppositions and premature judgement
- Listening respectfully, lovingly and openly in the spirit of Christ
- Speaking honestly about our own faith
- Emptying ourselves so that the other's real identity can be disclosed

Glossary:

Interfaith/interreligious: For many people the terms 'interfaith' and 'interreligious' are interchangeable. The Church prefers to use the term 'interreligious' for relations with other religions, and interfaith specifically for dialogue with Judaism.

[Dialogue] ...means not only discussion, but also includes all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment. #1p13

Dialogue demands a combination of 'genuine love and respect, and openness to unexpected truth and goodness, with a firm grasp of our own Christian faith and a readiness to be led by its light #9p15

Questions for discussion:

On the text

- Why does the Catholic Church ask us to develop dialogue with people of different religions?
- How can all Catholics be involved in this important task?
- To what extent should we co-operate with other Christians in this task?
- How far is interreligious dialogue a new teaching?
- Which sources of Church teaching does this new document draw upon?
- What do you understand by interreligious dialogue?

From your experience

- When did and how you first become aware of the term 'interreligious dialogue'?
- Do you have friends, neighbours or work colleagues of a different religion? What sort of relationship do you have with these people?
- Have you or your parish ever been involved in any interreligious activity? Talk about your experience.
- Have you ever discussed matters of faith or convictions with people of different religions? What was the outcome?
- How do you think we can deepen our understanding of our own faith through dialogue with people of other religions?
- How do you feel about experiencing the way people of other religions live and practise their beliefs? Do you have any particular interests or concerns?
- What are the issues that concern people of all religions and none in your area? Is there anything you and your neighbours could do to address these?

Ideas for Action:

To begin with

- Find out which religions are represented in your neighbourhood.
- Identify their places of worship in your area.
- Find out about their major festivals.
- Find out if there is an “interfaith forum” or equivalent in your area.
- Find out if your diocese has an interreligious team, co-ordinator or equivalent, and see whether there is someone with a similar brief in your parish.

To go further

- Join an “interfaith forum” or interfaith activity in your area.
- Find out about any courses or activities which deal with interreligious issues
- Find out about other religions from the net, from books or from personal contacts
- Visit a local place of worship.
- To find out more about what the Church teaches about interreligious dialogue read ‘Meeting God in Friend and Stranger’.