

Interfaith Relations

A Simple Guide

The Bible is full of stories where God's people cross boundaries to meet with strangers, foreigners or people who follow other gods. Elijah fed the widow of Zarephath, and healed her son, yet she lived in Sidon, a foreign land. Naaman the Syrian general, came to Elisha in Israel, for healing. Jonah was sent to preach the good news of God's mercy to the people of Nineveh. Followers of other gods they nevertheless responded with faith, much to Jonah's amazement. Jesus crossed religious and cultural fault lines many times, sharing truths with Samaritans, commending the faith of a gentile Centurion, a man whose official oath of obedience had been made to the Roman Emperor as a god. In Athens Paul recognised that an altar to an unknown God could be a gateway to the living God. Many of our biblical heroes and ancestors in the faith lived in multicultural, multifaith settings just as we do in Britain today. Reading our scriptures with interfaith issues in mind is a thought provoking and challenging experience. It opens our eyes to see how God is already fully involved in all the complexity and wonder of inter religious relations.

We hope you find this guide helpful as you explore Interfaith Relations in Oxford Diocese today.

PRAYER

God of the whole universe, help us to see how your Spirit crosses boundaries of religion, ethnicity, culture and class. You call us to follow Jesus who loved the outcast, the stranger, even his enemies. Give us grace to follow where you lead us and to be open to the possibilities that you call us to. For your glory and that your kingdom might come.

Amen.

Oxford is a Diocese containing people of many faiths. Have you ever visited a Gurdwara, Mosque, Synagogue or Temple?

Have you ever met a person of a different faith? If not, how might you start?

We hope this guide will help.

“I love coming to the Interfaith Ladies group meetings as it is a way of making links with people you I just wouldn’t meet otherwise ... and we learn about different sorts of food too!” Gill from Maidenhead

The Archbishop of Canterbury, when asked where he drew the line between evangelism and proselytism, responded, “I draw the line in terms of respect for the other; in starting by listening before you speak; in terms of love that is unconditional and not conditional to one iota, and of not speaking about faith unless you are asked about faith. It is all based around loving the person you are dealing with which means you seek their well-being and you respect their identity and their integrity.”

How can we develop Interfaith relations?

The most crucial part of developing interfaith relations is our attitude to other people. As you engage, expect to encounter difference. You may find you have a lot in common with people of other faiths, but you will also discover they think differently about things. Having honest and open conversations about what we have in common and where we differ is crucial for developing better understanding. Perhaps, for example, as you discuss fasting with a Muslim friend, or reading sacred texts with a Sikh, you will develop a clearer understanding of your own views on these topics. Over time, as your relationship deepens, you may well move from respecting people of other faiths to a deep relationship of trust where you can have very frank, open and honest conversations about matters that are very personal to each other. This can become the basis for cooperating together to tackle issues of mutual concern. At the heart of it all is an attitude of wanting genuine relationship and friendship.

Turning to practicalities, the first thing to do is find out about your neighbourhood:

Are there other faith centres of worship or of community gathering? Is there a local interfaith group? Who are your neighbours? Who do you work with? Who do your children go to school with? If you can not find people or groups to connect with, contact the nearest Interfaith group or the Venerable Jonathan Chaffey, Archdeacon of Oxford and Co-Chair of the Diocesan interfaith committee.

Fact: 99% of Parishes in Oxford have people of other faiths living within them.

Who lives in yours? Have a look at the webpage here [Diocese of Oxford | Interfaith relations \(anglican.org\)](http://Diocese of Oxford | Interfaith relations (anglican.org))

What about Mission and Evangelism?

The gospel of Jesus Christ is exactly that, good news. Of course we want to share that good news with our friends, including those of other faith backgrounds. But the question is, how can we do so in a way that ensures we are actually heard?

The Christian-Muslim Forum makes these practical suggestions:

1. We bear witness to, and proclaim our faith not only through words but through our attitudes, actions and lifestyles.
2. We cannot convert people, only God can do that. In our language and methods we should recognise that people's choice of faith is primarily a matter between themselves and God.
3. Sharing our faith should never be coercive; this is especially important when working with children, young people and vulnerable adults. Everyone should have the choice to accept or reject the message we proclaim and we will accept people's choices without resentment.
4. Whilst we might care for people in need or who are facing personal crises, we should never manipulate these situations in order to gain a convert.
5. An invitation to convert should never be linked with financial, material or other inducements. It should be a decision of the heart and mind alone.
6. We will speak of our faith without demeaning or ridiculing the faiths of others.
7. We will speak clearly and honestly about our faith, even when that is uncomfortable or controversial.
8. We will be honest about our motivations for activities and we will inform people when events will include the sharing of faith.
9. Whilst recognising that either community will naturally rejoice with and support those who have chosen to join them, we will be sensitive to the loss that others may feel.

An example of Interfaith relations in Milton Keynes: [Walking for Peace and Harmony](#)

As a lead in to National Interfaith Week in November 2010, a group of walkers, representing 4 different faiths (Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu), walked 8 miles across Milton Keynes, starting from the Jewish Reform Synagogue in Gifford Park and finishing at the Muslim Granby Mosque. Other people joined for parts of the walk, and during its course, visits were made to Christian Churches, a Buddhist Temple and a Sikh Gurdwara as well as The Well at Willen Interfaith Centre and the all-faiths Medicine Wheel by Willen Lake. At each site, the walkers were welcomed by members of each of the sites visited and an interfaith prayer was read followed by prayers from each of the particular sites. Hindu and Baha'i prayers for Peace were also offered in Campbell Park. MK Interfaith now meets monthly.

What Next?

Visit the Diocesan website: [Diocese of Oxford | Interfaith relations \(anglican.org\)](https://www.oxford.anglican.org/interfaith-relations)

Contact the Oxford Diocesan Committee for Interfaith relations via the Chairs Ven Jonathan Chaffey archdeacon.oxford@oxford.anglican.org or Revd Dr Paul Smith smith.paul.a@icloud.com

Contact your local Area interfaith advisor:

Oxford Area - Philip Ritchie philipsi68@gmail.com

Dorchester Area – Richard Cook cookingwok@gmail.com

South Bucks Area (including Slough and High Wycombe) - Hugh Ellis hughellis4@gmail.com

North Bucks Area (including Milton Keynes and Aylesbury) - Paul Smith smith.paul.a@icloud.com

Berkshire Area - tbc

Contact the national interfaith network via: [The Inter Faith Network \(IFN\)](https://www.interfaithnetwork.org/)

For general queries on interfaith relations or to tell us what you are doing locally please contact Archdeacon Jonathan's PA Claire Barratt claire.barratt@oxford.anglican.org

Photos and news events always welcome!

