

# Building good relations with people of different faiths

Today people of many faiths live side by side in Denmark. As people of faith our different religious traditions and beliefs teach us the importance of good relationships characterised by honesty, compassion and respect. But many of us are not used to sharing our daily lives with people of other faiths. How do we live our lives of faith with integrity and mutual respect without compromising what we ourselves are convinced is the truth?

The InterCultural Christian Centre (Tværkulturelt Center) offers the following **code of conduct** for building good relations between people of different faiths living in Denmark. We hope that it will become a basis for further discussion and consideration around the country.

It is based on a code of conduct which has been produced by the British InterFaith Network and endorsed by 90 organizations, among these representative bodies of all Britain's major faith communities.

## (1) ONE HUMAN FAMILY - Sharing our daily lives

Although we have different faiths, we are all members of the same human family. Therefore we should show each other respect and courtesy. This means:

- (a) Respecting other people's right within the Danish law to live in accordance with their beliefs and convictions.
- (b) Learning to understand what others believe and value, listening to their life stories and giving them the freedom to express their beliefs and values.
- (c) Respecting the convictions of others about food, dress and polite behaviour, trying to understand their practice and not behaving in ways which cause needless offence.
- (d) Recognizing that all of us at times fall short of the ideals of our own traditions and never comparing our own *ideals* with other people's *practices*.
- (e) Doing all we can to prevent disagreement from leading to conflict.
- (f) Always avoiding violence in our relationships.
- (g) As far as possible, seeking contact with each other within the local community before starting a controversy in the media.

## (2) THE DIALOGUE OF FAITH - Sharing our faith

When we talk about matters of faith with one another, we need to do so with honesty and straightforwardness,

respecting the freedom of others to share their beliefs with us. This means:

- (a) Recognizing that listening as well as speaking is necessary for a genuine dialogue.
- (b) Giving one another the freedom to share our personal testimony.
- (c) Being honest about our own beliefs and religious allegiances.
- (d) Not deliberately misrepresenting or disparaging other people's beliefs or practices.
- (e) Correcting misunderstandings or misrepresentations - not only of our own but also of other faiths.
- (f) Being open about our intentions.
- (g) Accepting that in public interfaith meetings we have a particular responsibility to ensure that the religious commitment of all those present will be respected.

## (3) CONVERSION - Asking others to join our faith

All of us want others to understand and respect our views. Some of us will also want to ask others to consider joining our faith. In a budding multifaith society where this is permitted within the law, the attempt should always be characterised by self-restraint and a concern for the other person's freedom and dignity. This means:

- (a) Always being sensitive and courteous.
- (b) Respecting the right of others to disagree with us.
- (c) Not imposing ourselves and our views on individuals or communities who are in vulnerable situations in ways which exploit these.
- (d) Avoiding violent language or action, threats, manipulation or the misuse of any kind of power, whether people are converting *to* or *from* our own religion.
- (e) Respecting another person's expressed wish to be left alone.

*Living and working together is not always easy. Religion appeals to deep emotions which can sometimes have destructive consequences. Where this happens, we must all seek to bring about reconciliation and mutual understanding. Here our faith can be a strong and positive motivation. As people of faith we have much to learn from one another without compromising our own beliefs and convictions. Let us move forward together by daring to acknowledge genuine differences and at the same time being willing to build on shared hopes and values.*