



B: Small Christian Communities

B\12C

What and Why Interreligious Dialogue?

TOPICS OF AsIPA TEXTS:

- A: GOSPEL SHARING(7 Steps)**
- B: SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES**
- C: A PARTICIPATORY CHURCH**
- D: TRAINING FOR PARISH TEAMS**
- E: SPIRITUAL FORMATION**
- F: FORMATION AND TRAINING OF LEADERS**

AsIPA B: Small Christian Communities

Interreligious Dialogue Programmes for Training Small Christian Communities

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What and Why Interreligious Dialogue?

Introduction

In this session we look more deeply into why we want to engage in Interreligious dialogue and the basic requirements for anyone engaging in IRD. This text is for a group of Catholics who want to enter into Interreligious Dialogue with their neighbours or colleagues. The session is a preparation for Interreligious dialogue. It is very important that we understand what Interreligious dialogue is and that we develop the skills needed for meaningful dialogue.

Another important point is that Interreligious dialogue should be, in this context, kept close to our life experiences and the capacity of the members. We are not aiming at any form of debate, theological discussion or discourse which requires special knowledge and expertise. For the dialogue of life with people of other faiths, wisdom and deep listening and sharing can be done by everyone. It requires that we trust in the Holy Spirit and love the ones who are participating in the dialogue.

In this short module we can only deal with one small part of the whole meaning of Interreligious dialogue. We are not entering into the other forms of dialogue that were mentioned in an earlier text.

A. WHAT IS INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Here is one definition.

“Interreligious dialogue is a meeting of people of differing religions, in an atmosphere of freedom and openness, in order to listen to the other, to try to understand that person’s religion, and hopefully to seek possibilities of collaboration. It is hoped that the other partner will reciprocate, because dialogue should be marked by a two-way and not a one-way movement. Reciprocity is in the nature of dialogue. There is give and take. Dialogue implies both receptivity and active communication.”ⁱ

1. *Let us put this definition into our own words and add to it in order to understand it well.*
2. *After 10 minutes, ask the small groups to give their version of the definition above.*

Supplement

Note that the basic elements of commitment to one's own faith; a desire to grow in the knowledge of the truth; a love for those with whom we dialogue are part of any definition of Interreligious dialogue.

3. *Discuss in the whole group briefly:*

Questions for reflection:

1. *What is your experience of sharing your faith with someone of a different faith and how do you feel about it?*
2. *Could you say it is a dialogue?*
3. *Is there a mutual desire to learn and listening and speaking by both? How did you feel during and after the dialogue?*

Allow for open and free discussion. Put some key words and points on a white board. Compare these points with those raised in the supplement after allowing some time for all to read the 'Elements in Interreligious Dialogue'.

Supplement

Elements in Interreligious Dialogue

- Participants have a deep respect for each other
- Participants together seek to know the truth about God and humanity more deeply
- Participants question to deepen the listening experience and to clarify meaning
- There is no such thing as right and wrong belief as we are sharing our personal, lived faith in order to bring greater friendship and unity.
- After such a time of dialogue, we seek to know more and to meet again to continue to grow in our understanding and appreciation of one another.

B. WHY ENTER INTO INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE?

Read the following little story. Tell your own story if you prefer as long as you can explain why moving to a deeper level of listening and sharing can help us grow in our appreciation and love of our neighbours of other faiths.

Maria and Ria have known each other for a very long time. They meet regularly at the neighbourhood market and occasionally they even share a cup of tea in their homes in between their chores. Their children are in the same school and they regularly meet as families in the school and nearby shopping mall. Now, the parish is announcing a training to help the members of Small Christian Communities to learn how to dialogue with people of different faiths. Maria can't

understand why she needs to do this training since faith and religion is one's own private affair and she and Ria, who is Buddhist, have been talking to each other for at least 10 years. Why rake up controversies? What more do we need to learn? she asked a member of the SCC. He explained: There are different levels of conversations that we have with friends and acquaintances. We are being invited to speak about what gives us hope and what we believe in a deeper way and we are also being invited to really listen to what helps our friends and neighbours in times of crises. What they believe about life and death and God.

Questions for discussion in buzz groups (10mins):

- a) *What are some reasons you find in the story for entering into a dialogue about faith with your friends and neighbours of other faiths?*
- b) *What are some additional reasons for Interreligious dialogue?*

Supplement

Read the points of this supplement quietly and after 5 minutes or less, discuss the significant points for you. These points are very important and if they have not been raised in the earlier discussion, take time to ensure that people understand the points.

We are living peacefully and we tolerate each other well already. What more is needed?

- We could grow from tolerance to appreciation of each other's beliefs
- We need to grow in the way we respect each other and give importance to our common humanity.
- To become more fully human and happier persons we need to communicate more deeply and nurture deeper friendships.
- We are seekers in life. We are always trying to understand the truths about ourselves and others and the world around us. We can seek together with people of different faiths as they offer us their understanding of the world.
- We are on a common human journey to the fullness of life and we always have something to learn.
- For real peace and harmony to exist we need more than superficial relationships and tolerance.

C. WHEN CAN WE SAY WE ARE READY FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE?

While conversations in daily life between people of different faiths can be entered into by everyone and belongs to human life, there are some qualities or conditions that belong to Interreligious dialogue that are necessary if the dialogue is to achieve the aims listed in B above.

Read the following points and add your own if possible.

1. You need to be firm in your own faith and clear in what you believe.
2. You have observed and experienced how your faith is alive within your family, your community and in the Church.
3. You really long to understand the faith of those living around you.
4. You are willing to share your beliefs and speak about them with people of other faiths with the deepest respect.

Questions for reflection

Personal reflection:

1. What do you think of the list of qualities or conditions above?
2. Do you feel that you have the necessary qualities and have met the conditions for Interreligious dialogue? Which quality or condition needs to be strengthened at this time for you?

Small group discussion:

3. Are there any qualities or conditions you would like to add or change?
4. Why is it important to be firm in our own faith before entering into Interreligious dialogue?

Supplement

I should be happy to share my faith, with joy and with respect. However, after reflecting and discussing I may not feel ready to engage in Dialogue of Religious Experiences and Beliefs.

I can however, continue in the Dialogue of Life and in the Dialogue of Social Action, for example at Christmas time, we can invite our neighbours of other faiths and explain some of our signs and symbols.

D. CONCLUSION - STEPS TOWARDS INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

- From our personal reflections and group discussions, let us agree on two or three ways in which we can improve our ability to enter into Interreligious dialogue.
- Using the qualities and conditions list with any additional points, ask which ones we can work on in the coming week/s. We can report on our progress at the next meeting.

(For example, we may feel that we are weak when it comes to being 'firm' in our faith especially to speak about our belief in the saving love of God, who Jesus is for us, or the mercy of God, or life after death. We may want to try reading up on these areas and sharing with our SCC members what we believe and live as a way to build up our own convictions and articulation of them.)

Let us pray together:

- For peace and unity in our country, society and neighbourhood.
- For the grace to speak about our faith in ways that touches the hearts of those we want to dialogue with.
- For a greater insight into the truths of our faith as we prepare ourselves for dialogue.
- For patience and love to develop skills for dialogue.
- For all the people in our neighbourhood, school (name your place) who belong to the different faiths.

End with a hymn or a prayer everyone knows.

¹Cardinal Francis Arinze, *Meeting Other Believers: The Risks and Rewards of Interreligious Dialogue* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing – Fowler Wright Books, 1997), 5.

METHOD OF AsIPA TEXTS

AsIPA TEXTS are compiled for Christian men and women at grass root level of the parish. They can be conducted most fruitfully in Small Christian Communities, Neighbourhood Communities, Parish Pastoral Councils or any other small groups in the parish.

AsIPA TEXTS can also be used with larger groups, e.g. in the parish hall - provided the "participatory method" is maintained in smaller working groups.

Features of the "AsIPA approach"

1. AsIPA TEXTS adopt a "participatory approach" in which all participants of a group search and discover for themselves as far as they are able to.
2. The texts are compiled in such a way that the facilitator can use them with a minimum of preparation.
3. The facilitator is requested to follow the text as closely as possible and allow the participants to contribute when indicated in the text.
4. The facilitator is not content with one answer to a question but he/she encourages as many participants as possible to search for an answer. "Buzz groups" of 2/3 are helpful to achieve maximum participation.
5. The SUPPLEMENT can help add to the findings of the participants and summarize them.
6. The SUMMARY is meant to be used as 'input'.

AsIPA: As-ian -I-ntegral -P-astoral -A-pproach

The Asian Bishops declared in the Final Statement of their Fifth Plenary Session in Bandung: The Church of 1990s has to be a "Participatory Church", a "Communion of Communities", a Church that "witnesses to the Risen Lord" (FABC5,#8).

The question was, how to promote this "new way of being Church". Therefore, late in 1993, jointly sponsored by the FABC Offices of Human Development and of Laity, a consultation meeting was held in Malaysia. It was during this consultation that the pastoral process for promoting a "Participatory Church" in Asia was termed AsIPA: Asian Integral Pastoral Approach.

AsIPA TEXTS (training programmes) follow this directive:

ASIAN

They want to implement the vision of the Asian Bishops and help Asian Christians face Asian life in the light of the gospel.

INTEGRAL

They aim at achieving a balance between the "spiritual" and the "social", between the individual and the community, between hierarchical leadership and the co-responsibility of the laity.

PASTORAL

They train the laity in their pastoral mission in Church and world.

APPROACH

The process of AsIPA TEXTS can be described as a pastoral approach which is "Christ- and Community centred". It involves the participants of workshops to search for themselves and allows them to experience a "New Way of Being Church."