

How to find out more

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland has a Churches Inter-Religious Network, which approaches inter faith activity from a firm Christian basis, while working in ways that respect the distinctiveness of the different religious traditions:
www.ctbi.org.uk/CDE/212
email: peter.colwell@ctbi.org.uk phone: 020 7654 7216

The Inter Faith Network for the UK has an interesting and helpful website: www.interfaith.org.uk with valuable contact details and useful guidelines for talking with people of another faith. The Inter Faith Network has also published a fuller Code of Conduct that give helpful guidelines for talking with people of different faiths. This is found on the website detailed on the previous page, under the heading 'Dialogue guidelines'. The Code has been endorsed by all member bodies, including the Churches Commission for Inter Faith Relations and the various denominations.

Social Responsibility Forum Discussion Papers

This is the second in a series of occasional papers that the Social Responsibility Forum (SRF) of Churches Together in Cumbria intends to produce to stimulate discussion and action in the churches of our county focussed upon a variety of social issues. These papers are suitable for use in a house group, study group or discussion group or by the whole church.

The first discussion paper, produced in 2004, focussed on the issue of the Arms Trade.

Further copies of both papers are available from:
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April 2005

Social Responsibility Forum

Discussion Paper
No. 2

CHURCHES
TOGETHER
in CUMBRIA

Churches Together
in Cumbria is part of
the national network
of Churches
Together in Britain
and Ireland

Talking with our Neighbours of other Faiths

Why Talk?

Britain is an increasingly diverse culture where people of many religious faiths live side by side. So building friendship and understanding between people of different religions is very important.

Some cities in particular are comprised of a very multi-faith population. This diversity gives a wonderful opportunity to understand each other better and share the many values that people of faith have in common.

All the major religions have teachings that encourage their followers to find ways to live in peace with others. Talking with people of other religions is not about compromising Christian principles or beliefs. It's about getting rid of misconceptions and prejudices, looking for common ground in shared values and finding constructive ways to discuss genuine areas of disagreement.

We've been reminded on a number of occasions in the last few years how people of different faiths have co-operated together in a very positive way, most recently in the tremendous response to the tsunami disaster, and previously for the Millennium Event and Golden Jubilee celebrations.

Why Cumbria? And what can we do?

But we live in a county where there are not many people of other faiths. This makes our situation rather different to that of people in many other parts of the country. We will find it harder to make opportunities to get alongside people of other faiths. We may not have had a chance to make personal connections and friendships with those of a different faith to ourselves. Does this sometimes cause us to be a bit afraid of such conversations and to be rather suspicious of faiths other than Christianity? Does it make it hard for us to have a clear view of the multi-faith experience in other parts of Britain?

Churches Together in Cumbria seeks to encourage Christians in our county not to be isolated from the riches of friendship and shared understanding with neighbours of other faiths in Britain today.

Churches Together in Cumbria is also keen to help ensure that the relatively small number of people of other faiths who do live and work in Cumbria do not feel isolated. Please take any chances that you get to talk and share with people of other faiths, e.g. at work, with neighbours of a different faith, in local shops. Friendly welcoming conversations and an interest in people's life and faith will help to ease isolation and can bring great benefits, both for those of other faiths and for us. It is also important that we give a warm welcome to tourists of other faiths who visit the gems our beautiful county has to offer, and help to provide facilities that will make more and more such tourists feel relaxed and comfortable here.

Even if you do not come across anyone of a different religion in your everyday life, you may like to invite someone of another faith to come to speak to your church about their life and how this is affected by their faith, and thereby to share in conversation with them. There are great benefits to our churches in hosting this kind of meeting: new experiences to listen to, leading to interesting discussion; enrichment of our knowledge and understanding; and often lasting friendship. A good way to find potential speakers is through the national inter faith officer for your Christian denomination.

Who are the other faith communities?

The Inter Faith Network links eight other major faith communities in Britain in addition to Christianity: Baha'i; Buddhist; Hindu; Jain; Jewish; Muslim; Sikh and Zoroastrian.

Afraid of getting into an argument? Or of causing offence?

We might be afraid to initiate a conversation about faith with someone of a different religion for fear of getting into an argument or causing offence. But if we keep a few guidelines in mind we should be able to have a helpful and thought-provoking conversation that builds up understanding between ourselves and someone of another faith:

When asking questions of others about their faith, offer a genuine personal reason for your query.

Find out what others actually believe and value, and let them express this in their own terms.

Find out what you have in common; what connects you rather than divides you.

Respect the other person's right to express their beliefs and convictions and to disagree.

We are not all the same — accept and respect the fact that the religious beliefs of someone may affect what they eat, what they wear and many of the ways they deal with other people.

Ensure your faith is presented with integrity—be prepared to say 'I don't know the answer to that, but I'll find out'.

Take care that everyone understands the religious terms that you are using—ask 'Is this clear?' every so often.

A sense of humour is good, but take care - jokes on religious topics can cause offence.

*Taken from **Connect: different faiths shared values**,
The Inter Faith Network for the UK, 2004*

You could also consider how the advice outlined above and in the Code can be used helpfully in talking with Christians of other denominations, traditions or theological perspectives to our own.