

The Letter Signed by 138 Muslim Clerics, Scholars and politicians on 11 October 2007, is welcomed and endorsed by the Church in Wales.

A Common Word between Us and You

"A Common Word"- Love of God and Love of Neighbour"

"A Common Word" dispels the myth that 'Interfaith Dialogue' is the privilege and initiative of Christians alone. It is a bold and a courageous step forward for Muslims to endorse officially the need for interfaith understanding, for peaceful co-existence and mutual enrichment of our respective faith communities.

Interfaith dialogue is however, still the privilege of the elite, the rich and the powerful; the desire for world peace urges us all to engage with the struggles and challenges of interfaith dialogue. In other words, in the course of time, **"A Common Word"** has to embrace *all* faith communities and to reach out into new territory. As stated, Christians and Muslims make up more than half of the world's population. The fear is that if these two religious communities cannot be at peace, the world cannot be at peace. Therefore, the question needs to be addressed about the other half of the world's population. We inhabit the inter-religious world, where we have to build on the goodwill of people of all faiths, and even go beyond to embrace all those who lack that goodwill.

Nevertheless, this initiative is a continuation and extension of existing attempts at dialogue, locally and nationally, seeking humbly and earnestly to build up a community based on peaceful co-existence, justice, respect and compassion. What is new is that it has been more openly recognised by those who have an official role to play on the scene of the world religions today.

"A Common Word" has generated graciousness, goodwill and generosity among many of the followers of Islam and Christianity. It needs not only to be received and accepted, but also requires that there should be appreciation for the fortitude, courage and serenity shown by those who are endeavouring to address and contribute to the discussion. It is a sign of the times - a sign of hope and an instrument of peace for the future of humanity.

An important area of shared understanding between Christians and Muslims is the commonality of worship; prayer is vital for spirituality in both our religions. A way to move forward is to join in the longing of the

Psalmist, “Search me (us), O God, and know my (our) heart; test me (us) and know my (our) anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me (us), and lead me (us) in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139: 23-24)

What we can do in our given situation and circumstances in Wales:

Wales is making a concrete response to this situation through a series of consultations between Christians and Muslims on the theme, “ Fear, Democracy and Religion,” jointly organised by the Muslim Council of Wales, the Welsh Centre for International Affairs and the Church in Wales. We believe this can set the tone and scene for genuine dialogue between Muslims and Christians here in Wales.

- a) We shall attempt to dispel the ignorance and indifference that clouds our misunderstanding of the basic Islamic principles, traditions and customs. We are doing this by providing elementary education on Islam to our own Christian members and hope to encourage appropriate educational initiatives for Muslims about Christian faith and practice. Here we have to include the principles of **love of God** enshrined in both the Faiths. We are asking questions about what we can say together about God. For example can we declare that God is God of all – whether Christians, Muslims, Jews or Hindus? And if God is God of all creation, can God be Allah, Elohim, Adonai, and Brahman? We have much shared language about God, and we seek to highlight the ideas already enshrined in our faith that build shared understanding.
- b) We shall provide cultural and social environments for both communities to encounter, and to interact and share our common life through hospitality and celebration of festivals.
- c) We strive to welcome Muslims with open arms, and will continue to seek opportunities to engage in dialogue with them in our communities and beyond, and wherever possible to join hands with our Muslim brothers and sisters to work for justice, peace and social cohesion.
- d) Honest and courageous dialogue is a challenge for both Christian and Muslim communities. Not all Christians and Muslims feel able to participate in dialogue and some hold to extreme positions that can be difficult to engage with. There is dialogue needed both

within and between our faith traditions. We have to work at this in order to overcome ignorance, indifference and hostility. Here we have to include the principles of **love of your neighbour** enshrined in both faiths. The concept of neighbour is one that transcends human divisions of colour, caste, ethnic origin or religion. Our neighbour remains our neighbour regardless of such distinctions and is able to receive and give God's blessings according to Muslim and Christian tradition.

- e) This initiative for dialogue should raise confidence and hope for both the communities of faith. It can help in bringing about conditions necessary for encouraging freedom of religion, the right to religious expression and equal opportunities for the practice of faith. It is especially useful for those who are faced with the particular challenges of being a majority or minority faith community in the context of diversity.
- f) Mutual learning and discussion of religious beliefs, traditions and practice should foster deeper understanding between us. St. Paul's letter to Philippians 2:13 clearly summarises the aim of this initiative: **"For it is God who works in you (us) to will and to act according to His good purpose."** As such, God's Spirit is at work in all world Faiths, and it is certainly very much so between people of Christianity and of Islam now through **"A Common Word."**