



6. Religious extremism is unacceptable.

The vast majority of members of religious groups are peace-loving and peaceful. Unfortunately, every religion has its extremists; those who condemn, threaten or attack other people, and use their religious tradition to justify this behaviour. Any form of extremism is unacceptable. However, this does not condone a blanket condemnation of any particular faith: the extremists alone are to be held responsible for their acts of violence, not all the members of the faith group to which they belong. It is, though, the duty of religious communities to distance themselves from extremist activities, to condemn such actions and to seek the reason for the rise of extremism in their faith tradition. At the same time, every member of society is called upon to tackle the social, political and economic causes which nourish extremism.



7. Human rights are to be respected.

Members of faith communities must not cite their religious and cultural traditions in order to justify human rights violations, whether towards their members or towards those outside. For example, no one should be subjected to discrimination on the basis of sex or sexual orientation. Human rights apply to every human being and are recognised throughout the world. These rights are to be upheld, not only by nations, but also by every individual, organisation and faith group. The right to freedom of religion, as with any other right, is limited. That limit is reached at the point where other fundamental rights are violated.

8. Respond to other faith traditions with respect.

Other religious traditions and beliefs can be disturbing, particularly when they challenge or contradict our own beliefs. Other faiths and different beliefs are to be treated with respect and tolerance. It is, of course, quite acceptable to speak of our own faith. But when doing so, it is necessary to avoid any attempt to influence others to turn away from their faith, or to encourage or even coerce them into a conversion. At the same time, individuals should be free to grow in their faith as they see fit, or to adopt a different faith if they wish to do so.



9. Openness is vital in interfaith encounters.

Any encounter with people of other religions is challenging and exciting. Learning about other religions, particularly through personal contact with people of other faiths, promotes mutual understanding and builds awareness and appreciation of each other's faith. The key factors in such meetings are openness, the ability to see things from a different perspective, empathy, and the willingness to meet each other as equals. Such an approach prepares the ground for the growth of mutual trust and appreciation.



10. Interfaith dialogue is enriching.

An interfaith conversation about everyday life situations and beliefs can help us see that very often we share similar joys and concerns, wishes and hopes. Such a conversation can also reveal that religions have a common understanding of many fundamental human issues and values; whether moral or ethical or in our search for meaning in life. An interfaith conversation can also lead to a better appreciation of the strengths of our own faith, as well as those of others; thereby reinforcing our own religious identity and deepening our faith. So an interfaith conversation can enrich our life, build a sense of belonging together and contribute to peaceful coexistence within our society.



Reformierte Kirchen
Bern-Jura-Solothurn
Eglises réformées
Berne-Jura-Soleure



Katholische Kirche Region Bern



Christkatholische Landeskirche
des Kantons Bern
Eglise nationale catholique-chrétienne
du canton de Berne



- Reformed Churches Berne-Jura-Solothurn, Department for ecumenical affairs, mission, international cooperation and migration, Tel. 031 340 24 24, fami@refbejuso.ch, www.refbejuso.ch/oeme-migration
- Roman Catholic Church Region Berne, Service Church in Dialogue Tel. 031 300 33 40, kid.bern@kathbern.ch, www.kathbern.ch/kid
- Old Catholic National Church of Canton Berne Tel. 031 318 06 55, landeskirche.bern@christkatholisch.ch, www.christkatholisch.ch/landeskirchebern
- 'Meeting Point for Religion and Migration' is a joint working group of the above-mentioned churches.



10 tips for living together in a multi-faith society



Today we live in a multicultural and multi-faith society; a diversity that is both enriching and challenging. Religious and cultural traditions can be used to justify intolerance, discrimination and violence and can give rise to a lack of understanding or rejection. But equally, they can nurture a sense of meaning, strengthen identity, bring people together, motivate them to work for justice, and promote peace.

All the different religions represented in Switzerland today arrived as a result of migration and were originally alien to the country, and that includes Christianity. The message of the Bible clearly calls Christians, in following the example of Jesus, to stand up for foreigners and minorities, to promote non-violence, justice and peace and to show respect and love towards all human beings. Christians both cause and suffer injustice. For this reason and because of their position in Switzerland as the largest faith community, Christians feel that they bear a special responsibility for upholding religious freedom and maintaining peace between religions in society. Christians are called to seek to encounter and dialogue with people of other faiths and to do their utmost to ensure that every member of our society is free to live out and practice their faith within the framework of the Swiss legal system.

The following ten tips for living together in a multi-faith society are offered in support of this aim and are designed to encourage reflection and discussion. The ecumenical working group “Meeting Point for Religion and Migration”, which produced this statement, is available to provide assistance for church parishes, and any other interested persons, in organising discussions, events and projects on this theme.



1. Religions are diverse within themselves.

In all religions, there are various currents, denominations and groups: fundamentalist, conservative, moderate and progressive. These differences can be seen, for example, in the interpretation of sacred writings or in the understanding of religious dogmas and the conduct of rites and practices. There have always been, and there always will be, discussions about which interpretation and which practice is “correct”. And these discussions give rise to conflicts, divisions and reform movements. Given the great diversity within any faith group, any generalizations should be avoided. There is no *one* Christianity, any more than there is *one* Islam or *one* Hinduism.

2. Religions change.

Religions each have their own history. They arose at a certain time and in a particular social, political, economic and cultural setting. They change over time. They also spread to other societies, for example, by means of migration, mission, and conversion. Just as religions change, so a person’s individual faith changes over a life-time. Change is part of being human.



3. Religion should support integration.

Religions play an important role in integration. True, they can cause isolation or segregation; but their aim should be to offer the comfort and security of a familiar base where their members can feel at home and from which they can step out confidently to become part of the new society in which they live. Religions have a duty to help people to overcome their difficulties, give meaning to their lives and strengthen their identity. They are to encourage a positive image of humankind, promote mutual respect, and encourage their members to act for the common good and for justice. Their role is to help people to build contacts and to support each other.



4. People must not be reduced to their religion.

In any approach to other faiths and particularly in discussions with their members, it is easy to focus only on the differences and difficulties, the things which divide. So much so, that the common ground, the positive aspects and any areas apart from religion are forgotten. There is a danger that people become stereotyped and reduced to no more than their religious affiliation. However, this is only one of the many aspects in a person’s life. Profession and hobbies, social and material status, sexual identity and orientation, relationships and political beliefs are all important components of a person’s character and personality. Each of these factors can be seen as something that unites or divides. No-one should ever be reduced to any one single aspect of their life; each should be seen as a whole human being.

5. There must not be any discrimination on the basis of faith.

Members of faith communities are sometimes submitted to degrading or prejudicial treatment without cause. There are many examples of this; when someone is insulted or not hired because of the way they dress or because of their religious traditions, or when certain religious symbols or articles of clothing are forbidden, or when religious buildings are prohibited. This is unacceptable and contravenes the laws against discrimination and the freedom of religion laid down in the Federal Constitution. This latter gives everyone the right to hold and practice their faith freely within the framework of current Swiss legislation.

