

**Synodal Council of the Reformed Churches
Bern – Jura**

**Principles for the living together of the religions within the
territory of our Church and the inter-religious dialogue**

Policy

We declare

1. There are different religions in the world. The Christian religion is one of them. We are part of Christianity.
2. Religion marks our culture and culture influences our religion. Whenever religions meet, one religion adopts elements of the other religion and they amalgamate. The Christian religion contains a variety of experiences of faith and doctrines.
3. Religion marks our life and life influences our faith. In religious life, different attitudes and dogmas mingle.
4. Every religion has its history. Religions change without losing their identity. This rule also applies to the individual. A person's beliefs change during lifetime.
5. Differing opinions within one and the same religion can either have a negative effect or supplement each other. In the last decades, we made many positive experiences with inter-confessional living and working together. What is possible with different confessions should also be realizable with religions. We want to transpose this positive inter-confessional experience at the level of religions. The positive echoes of inter-religious discussions at the Round Table of religions encourage us to continue.
6. Living together in an environment of diversity is not easy. Many people perceive this diversity as a threat. Their feelings must be taken seriously. We recognize the tensions resulting from the wish to protect the familiar on one hand and to accept the unknown on the other. Both attitudes are justified. On both sides, however, there is fear and prejudice, having its roots in a burdened past. So much the more, mutual respect is essential. Nobody has the right to threaten another person. It is our prophetic duty as a Church to attend to it so that nobody suffers injustice, and it is our pastoral duty to contribute to it so that nobody must be afraid of others.
7. In our country, Christians are the majority. It is the duty of this majority to attend to a fertile and fair living together of confessions and religions. The situation of religious minorities thus mainly depends on the attitude of the Churches. They assist the Government in its task to keep and promote peace among the religions.
8. Even though we are not a classical immigration country, we are, de facto, an immigration society. On the territory of our Church, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and other religions live together. Most representatives of non-Christian religions are foreigners; many of them have been living in our country for a long time already. Goal and permanent task is, to strive for a

harmonious living together of all people. To come to an understanding among the religions thus is essential.

Our Attitude :

1. We confess our faith in Jesus Christ and we are in his service. The message of the Bible is binding for us in private life as well as in public life, in the State, in society, in economy and culture. The message of the Bible obliges us to protect all living creatures, to assure right and justice, to respect freedom of opinion and religious liberty and to fight physical or spiritual suffering and its causes.
2. We transmit our faith, render it understandable and work together with all people who are of benevolent intention. The way Jesus behaved towards representatives of other religions obliges us and encourages us to confession and dialogue. We do not try to alienate others from their religion and to convince them to join our Church.
3. We recognize the cultural diversity of the Jewish-Christian tradition and value it theologically positive.
4. We do not judge syncretism a priori negative and are aware of its existence in the Reformed Church. Syncretism is not contradictory to the Gospel.
5. We have no right to pass judgment on a person's faith. Believers shall be faithful to their creed and be free to change. We respect other people's convictions as well as their right to live their faith independently.
6. We have no right either to pass judgment on religious communities. We are open for any process that enables the Churches, the confessions and the religions to discover elements of truth to share, to communicate and to receive.
7. Even though human beings have different names for their God and differing ways to worship him, we believe that God respects everyone who invokes him sincerely. We thus approve to prayers held in common and pay attention that differences are not extinguished but made comprehensible.
8. We stand up for the human rights of all. The reference to the religion does not disengage from the responsibility to observe, to grant and to protect human rights. Special attention is paid to the equality of women.
9. We are guided by the principle that the existing and necessary differences among human beings are relative and not absolute. These differences do not question, however, the fact that we all are children of God. We thus try to

preserve our religious and cultural identity not by demarcation but by integrating it in our living together.

10. Any radical and fundamentalist attitude is an intolerable form of religiousness, a source of hatred, of fear and violence. We disassociate from any kind of extremism that threatens, condemns or fights people with other convictions. Our religion obliges us to exercise tolerance and to promote peace. We expect the same attitude from other religions. The most efficient opposition to radicalism existing in every religion is to engage, with insistence and patience, in the inter-religious dialogue.
11. Being aware of the diversity existing within our National Church, we know that engaging for one side means not to forget the other side. We thus want to be everybody's advocate so that nobody is privileged or discriminated. We would like to make our contribution so that everyone in this country can feel free and protected.

What we want and what we can do for the peaceful living together of religions

In the last years, decisive experiences were made in the Canton Bern as far as the inter-religious dialogue was concerned. Important steps could be achieved on the way to integration of other religious communities into our society. Encouraged by the positive experience made, the Synodal Council decided to continue its road with persistence.

1. The Synodal Council confirms and communicates his conclusions and his attitude in public as follows:
 - in oecumenical contacts
 - within the Swiss Federation of Protestant Churches
 - in front of the Synod
 - in front of the regional Synods
 - at the conferences of the Congregational Council and Parsons
 - At the Deacon's Chapter
 - in front of political authorities
 - in front of representatives of economy
2. The Synodal Council actively promotes tolerance. It stands up for the endeavour to grant religious communities the necessary space in our society to practice their religion freely, as well as to realize the following goals :
 - to open the churches, buildings and premises
 - to participate in politics and society
 - to promote the integration at schools, hospitals and homes
 - to authorize funeral rituals according to the doctrine

3. The Synodal Council supports the efforts to improve the dialogue within the territory of our Church by:
 - offering continued education
 - rendering ecclesiastical collaborators more sensitive
 - offering encounters between congregations and representatives of other religions

4. The Synodal Council rejects any kind of religious extremism and radicalism and underlines its attitude by:
 - public statements
 - the dialogue between authorities and political parties
 - interventions in the field of education
 - contacts with sports clubs and associations

5. The Synodal Council expects the theological work to be done and intensified as well oecumenically as inter-religiously by the following measures:
 - theological studies
 - continued education for parsons
 - education and continued education in the field of catechesis and diaconry
 - continued education of adults

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