

## **Called to Be Neighbors and Witnesses: Guidelines for Interreligious Relationships**

*2016 United Methodist Book of Resolutions, #3291*

The emergence of religiously diverse societies and the new dynamics in old religious communities prompt many faith communities to reconsider how they relate to one another and to prevailing secular ideologies representing a great opportunity

### ***Called to Be Neighbors***

The vision of a “worldwide community of communities” commends itself to many Christians as a way of being together with persons of different religious convictions in a pluralistic world. Ultimately, this is to shift the question from, “To which church do we belong?” to “Have we participated in promoting the work of the Holy Spirit?” That suggests that we United Methodist Christians, not just individually, but corporately, are called to be neighbors with other faith communities, and to work with them to create a human community, a set of relationships between people at once interdependent and free, in which there is love, mutual respect, and justice.

### ***Called to Be Witnesses***

Jesus issued his famous missionary mandate, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations.” (Matthew 28:19) Thus, we are called to bridge geographic, sociological, racial, or cultural boundaries. We are to proclaim and witness to the God who has bound humanity together in care for one another, regardless of our differences.

As we reflect on our faith and in our witness to and encounter with our diverse neighbors, we rediscover that God is also Creator of all humankind, the “one God and Father of all, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all” (Ephesians 4:6 GNT).

### ***Dialogue: A Way to Be Neighbors***

Dialogue is the intentional engagement with persons who hold other faith perspectives for purposes of mutual understanding, cooperation, and transformation. A positive foundation from which to connect with persons in other faith communities is recognition of the gifts they bring. Engaging in dialogue with positive expectation offers the sharing of mutually beneficial spiritual gifts and overcoming past hostilities. Each religious community’s faith offers a positive way to resolve conflict and offers resources for building community. Dialogue seeks to provide an environment allowing differences, affirms the positives, and brings a deeper relationship.

### ***Dialogue: A Way to Witness***

Dialogue can lead to a relationship of mutual acceptance, openness, and respect. True and effective dialogue requires Christians be truly open to persons of other faith communities about each other’s convictions on life, truth, salvation and witness.

Dialogue leads to the understanding and receiving of each other’s wisdom. Dialogue creates relationships of mutual understanding, open-ness, and respect. We leave to the Holy Spirit the

outcome of our mutual openness. A large part of our task, and foundational to interreligious dialogue and cooperation, is to learn to discern the Spirit's work.

We must be obedient to our own call to witness and be loving and neighborly to persons of other faith communities. In dialogue, these deeply held truths encounter each other in witness and love, so that greater wisdom and understanding of truth may emerge that benefits all parties.

### ***Neighbors and Witnesses: Into the New Millennium***

The command to love one's neighbors and the call to witness to Jesus Christ to all people are inseparably linked. The profound challenge this represents for United Methodist Christians can be seen most sharply in the many diverse religious movements and to the religious nones. The calling to be witnesses and neighbors to all people, is based on the biblical caution not to bear false witness (Matthew 19:18) and the admonition to live at peace with all people (Hebrews 12:14). Love of neighbor and witness to Christ are the two primary attitudes United Methodist Christians must affirm in their relationship with persons of other faiths and those without a religious tradition.

United Methodist Christians enter a new millennium full of challenges and opportunities. We seek to learn how the Holy Spirit works among all peoples of the world, especially among those in other religious traditions and to those without a religious tradition.

These guidelines will assist United Methodists to be faithful to their call to witness and the call to be neighbors with persons of other faith communities.

1. Identify the various faith communities and familiarize your congregation with them.
2. Initiate dialogues with different faith communities, remaining sensitive to areas of historic tension. Be open to the possibilities for deepened understanding and new insight.
3. Work with persons of other faith communities to resolve economic, social, cultural and political problems in the community.
4. Plan community celebrations with an interreligious perspective together with persons of other faith traditions.
5. Develop new models of community building that strengthen relationships and allow people to dwell together in harmony while honoring the integrity of their differences.

### ***Intent***

The intent in developing interreligious relationships is not to amalgamate all faiths into one religion. In dialogue, we mutually seek insight into the wisdom of other traditions and we hope to overcome our fears and misapprehensions.

United Methodist Christians are neighbors with persons whose religious commitments are different from our own. We open our-selves to dialogue and engagement with persons of other faith communities and to other Christians whose understandings, cultures, and practices may be different from our own.

***Therefore,*** The United Methodist Church, in the knowledge that Jesus calls us to the blessings of peacemaking and reminds us that the highest law is to love God and neighbor, calls its members and its leaders:

1. To oppose demagoguery, manipulation, and image making that seeks to label Arabs and Muslims in a negative way;
2. To counter stereotypical and bigoted statements made against Muslims and Islam, Arabs and Arabic culture;
3. To increase knowledge of neighbor by study and personal contact that yield a greater appreciation of the Muslim and Arabic contributions to society;
4. To act decisively to include Arabs and Muslims in interfaith and community organizations;
5. To pray for the perfection of community among us and to participate fully in the process of bringing it into being; and
6. To publicly denounce through statements from the Council of Bishops and the General Board of Church and Society current practices that discriminate against this community.

In order to aid United Methodists to respond to this call, all boards, agencies, and institutions of The United Methodist Church are requested to provide resources and programs and, where appropriate, to act in advocacy.

*ADOPTED 1988*

*AMENDED AND READOPTED 2000, 2004*

*READOPTED 2008 AMENDED AND READOPTED 2016*

*RESOLUTION #3141, 2012 BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS*

*RESOLUTION #3128, 2008 BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS*

*RESOLUTION #78, 2004 BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS*

*RESOLUTION #69, 2000 BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS*

See Social Principles, ¶162B To purchase the Book of Resolutions, [click here](#).

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