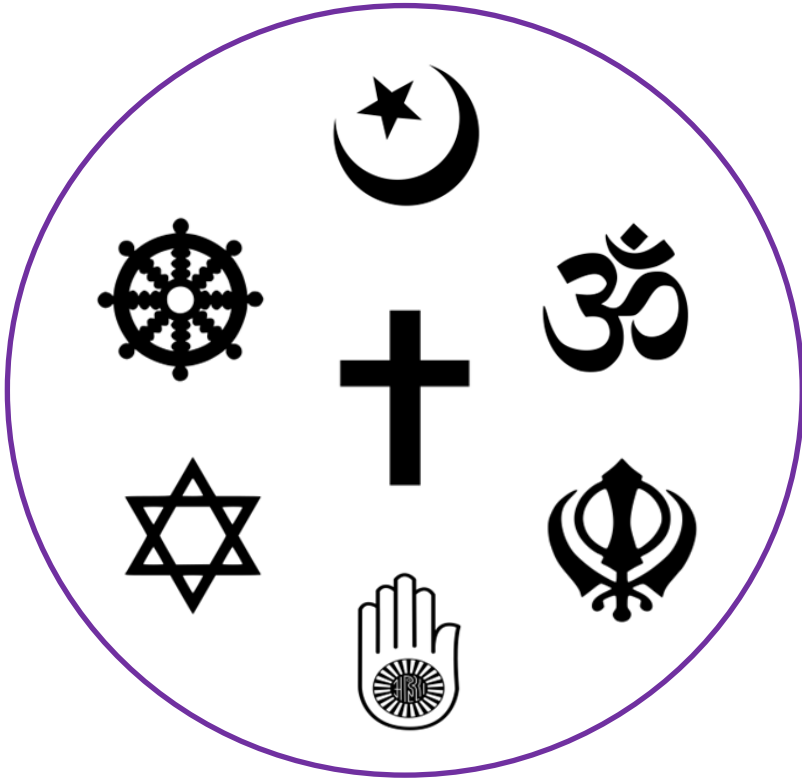


The Salvation Army
United Kingdom and Ireland Territory



**Living and Working
with
People of Other Faiths**

Connecting with people of other faiths

We live in a multicultural and multi-faith society. But how much do we know about other people's beliefs and practices? And how well do we relate to people of other faiths and work with them for the good of our communities?

These guidelines highlight ways in which we can increase our understanding and create fruitful relationships and partnerships.

Why is interfaith engagement important?

We are called to love God and love others, which means we cannot ignore or merely tolerate people of other faiths. We need to engage with them in a loving and constructive way. By doing so we witness to the love of God, serve our communities, build greater social cohesion and help to bring about justice and reconciliation.

The Inter Faith Network for the UK stresses the importance of building good relations with people of different faiths:

'The opportunity lies before us to work together to build a society rooted in the values we treasure. But this society can only be built on a sure foundation of mutual respect, openness and trust. This means finding ways to live our lives of faith with integrity and allowing others to do so too. Our different religious traditions offer us many resources for this and teach us the importance of good relationships characterised by honesty, compassion and generosity of spirit.'¹

Salvation Army corps and individual Salvationists are therefore encouraged to engage positively with people of other faiths. Some corps are part of a local interfaith group and The Salvation Army is a member of several national interfaith organisations, including the Inter Faith Network for the UK, Interfaith Scotland, the Council of Christians and Jews and the Christian Muslim Forum.

¹ <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/building-good-relations-with-people-of-different-faiths-and-beliefs>

Our territory recognises three significant ways of engaging with people of other faiths: respectful dialogue, joint social action and sensitive witness.

1. Respectful dialogue

Dialogue depends on and deepens mutual understanding and trust. It does not mean denying our own beliefs but, instead, being willing to listen to and learn from the convictions of others.

Dialogue can be the basis of joint service in the community and a means of authentic witness. It can also be an opportunity for the grace of God to flow in our lives and the lives of others. As we encounter people of other faiths with genuine openness a space is created in which God can move, revealing himself afresh and nourishing our spirits.

Andrew Smith explains what interfaith dialogue is and what it can achieve:

‘What makes interfaith dialogue different from two people of different faiths chatting in the street? The answer, I think, lies in the intent of the people: in what way are they entering into the conversation and what do they expect out of it? A meeting of friends becomes dialogue when there is a meeting of equals who seek to understand the other person and to be transformed through the encounter. As Christians, we would also want to say that in dialogue one wants to discern God's activity in the life of the other person and in the encounter.’²

Salvationists are encouraged to learn about the beliefs and practices of different religions, understand and talk about their own faith and seek to deepen mutual understanding, trust and respect.

- The Inter Faith UK website has helpful resources to support dialogue: interfaith.org.uk/resources/dialogue-between-people-of-different-faiths-and-beliefs

² Andrew Smith, *Vibrant Christianity in Multifaith Britain* (2018), pp69-70

2. Joint social action

The United Kingdom and Ireland Territory's mission priorities include serving others without discrimination, caring for creation and seeking justice and reconciliation. These forms of social action can be strengthened and made more effective when people of different faiths work together. For example, local decision makers are more likely to listen and respond when faith groups speak about local issues with a united voice.

On 3 January 2000, as part of the Millennium celebrations, an Act of Reflection and Commitment was undertaken by the UK's leading faith community representatives. It expressed their commitment to an inclusive society which recognises the contribution that people of all faiths make to national life. Salvationists can wholeheartedly affirm this commitment as we seek to work with people of other faiths in service to our communities.

Act of Reflection and Commitment³

We commit ourselves,
as people of many faiths,
to work together
for the common good,
uniting to build a better society,
grounded in values and ideals we share:
community, personal integrity,
a sense of right and wrong,
learning, wisdom and love of truth,
care and compassion,
justice and peace,
respect for one another,
for the Earth and its creatures.

We commit ourselves,
in a spirit of friendship and co-operation,
to work together
alongside all who share our values and ideals,
to help bring about a better world,
now and for generations to come.

³ <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/act-of-commitment>

3. Sensitive witness

One of our territory's mission priorities is to share the good news of Jesus but, in our multi-faith society, this should be done with sensitivity.

Sharing our own faith-story can be a good place to start, and this should always be done in the context of a positive relationship. Explaining why our faith means so much to us must not be seen by the other person as a threat but as a natural part of our friendship. And this means being willing to hear their story as well. If we want people to listen to us, we must listen to them.

- A joint publication by the World Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the World Evangelical Alliance has guidelines for good practice: *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World* ⁴

Christian views of other faiths

If we are to witness sensitively, we should try and understand how Christians view other faiths. There are three main approaches:

- **Exclusivism**
A narrow type of exclusivism emphasises the uniqueness of God's revelation in Christ and affirms that salvation is received only through conscious faith in him. A broader type of exclusivism also affirms that Christ is the unique revelation of God and that his atoning death is the only source of salvation but also acknowledges that some truth is revealed in other religions and that salvation can extend to people who have not made a conscious Christian commitment. Other religions are not a means of salvation, but individuals within those religions can respond to the grace of God according to the light they have received.
- **Inclusivism**
This view also sees Jesus as the definitive revelation of God but, unlike exclusivism, it regards other religions as ways to salvation in themselves.

⁴ <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents>

- **Pluralism**

This approach claims that religious differences are simply the result of different interpretations of the same God and that salvation can be found in any religion. Christ is not unique, but only one among many great religious teachers and leaders.

The Salvation Army's approach

The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine says, 'The insights of non-Christian religions may indicate spiritual awareness and understanding, but they do not present Jesus Christ as the Word made flesh (John 1:14-18).'⁵ This reflects the broad exclusivist understanding that Christ is the unique revelation of God but that some truth is revealed in other religions.

The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine also says, 'We cannot dictate to God who will be saved and who not. But we can trust to the judgment of God the lives of all those whose life and experience, personal creed and spiritual opportunities are different from our own because he is the loving Creator of all (Romans 2:12-16).'⁶ This reflects the broad exclusivist view that, although Christ is the only source of salvation, individuals within non-Christian religions can respond to the grace of God according to the light they have received.

These three categories have their limitations, as demonstrated by Lesslie Newbigin:

'The position which I have outlined is exclusivist in the sense that it affirms the unique truth of the revelation in Jesus Christ, but it is not exclusivist in the sense of denying the possibility of the salvation of the non-Christian. It is inclusivist in the sense that it refuses to limit the saving grace of God to the members of the Christian Church, but it rejects the inclusivism which regards the non-Christian religions as vehicles of salvation. It is pluralist in the sense of acknowledging the gracious work of God in the lives of all human beings, but it rejects a pluralism which denies the uniqueness and decisiveness of what God has done in Jesus Christ.'⁷

⁵ *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*, p4

⁶ *Ibid*, p227

⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989), pp182-3

What can we do?

Here are some practical suggestions for engaging with people of other faiths.

- Learn more about other faiths and practices by reading and researching, having conversations with people of other faiths and perhaps visiting their places of worship.
- Link up with your local interfaith group, which you can find at interfaith.org.uk/involved/groups.
- Take part in the Inter Faith Buddies Scheme, which brings two people of different faiths together to engage in weekly dialogue for six weeks. Find out more at interfaith.org.uk/resources/inter-faith-buddies.
- Join in Inter Faith Week events that take place each November. Find out what's happening near you at interfaithweek.org.
- Get involved in interfaith community projects such as litter picks, tree planting or food banks.
- Take part in interfaith initiatives to raise awareness of social justice issues. Linking up with Citizens UK is one way of doing this: citizensuk.org.

Further reading

- *Celebrating Difference, Staying Faithful: How to Live in a Multi-faith World* by Andrew Wingate
- *Distinctly Welcoming: Christian Presence in a Multifaith Society* by Richard Sudworth
- *Friendship and Exchange with People of Other Faiths: A Context for Witness and Dialogue* by Celia Blackden
- *Vibrant Christianity in Multifaith Britain* by Andrew Smith

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Love God
Love Others