

Lutherans and Religious Pluralism

Northwest Synod of Wisconsin's Lay School of Ministry

11-12 November 2011

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I. An Introduction to Religious Pluralism

A. Religious Diversity in the United States and Europe

B. Comparing the American and European Contexts

1. population statistics
2. cultural factors in Europe
3. mitigating factors for integration in the U.S.

C. Islam in the U.S.

1. history
2. current population

D. Changing Attitudes in the U.S.

1. increasing negativity toward Islam and Muslims
2. mosque construction controversies
3. role of the Internet
4. reaction to fear

E. Diversity and Pluralism

II. Key Issues in Being with the Other

A. Balancing Christian Commitments with Inter-Religious Openness

1. Lutheran academic work
2. my own experience

B. Challenges and Pitfalls

1. mutual ignorance
2. prejudice and hate
3. Islamophobia
4. denominational gaps
5. tendency to reduce all to a simplistic common ground
6. failure to move beyond tolerance

C. Lutheran "Distinctives"

1. use of the intellect
2. living with ambiguity and complexity
3. grace
4. social statements
5. tradition of ecumenical and interfaith engagement
6. potential bridge role

III. Strategies and Resources for Being with the Other

A. How Should the ELCA Relate to the Varied Jewish Traditions Represented in the U.S.?

1. global rise in anti-Semitism
2. historical legacy of Germany and the Jews
3. ELCA engagement of Judaism and Jews
4. anti-Jewish New Testament passages
5. Israel and the Palestinians and our accompaniment of ELCJHL
6. intermarriage and ethnic identity

B. What Should Our Role Be Towards Our Islamic Neighbors?

1. ELCA engagement of Islam and Muslims
2. current initiatives

C. Specific strategies And Resources

1. intra-Lutheran conversation
2. grassroots experiential education
3. educational resources, literature, and film

D. Signs of Hope for Constructive Engagement

1. changes in academia
2. outreach by American Muslims
3. relationship success stories

IV. Key Issues in Acting with the Other

A. Not "Should," But "How" We Work Together with Other Faith Traditions on Social Issues

1. Christian calling to serve the neighbor
2. civil society building

B. Challenges and Pitfalls

1. lack of initiative, vision, leadership, funding
2. countering media misinformation
3. stopping short of authentic grassroots relationship-building
4. failure to acknowledge inter-religious differences

C. What Lutherans and All Christians Might Do to Build Mature Relationships with Religious Others

1. initiate a dialogue group
2. facilitate transformation through experiential learning
3. move beyond mere tolerance to mature relationships

D. Opportunities and Reasons for Hope

1. shared commitments
2. "the big Shift"
3. interest at all levels of ELCA

V. Strategies and Resources for Acting with the Other

A. Beyond Dialogue to Friendship and Shared Social Action

1. examples of pluralist social action
2. ELCA interfaith partners

B. Brainstorming What We Can Do in Our Own Communities

1. awareness-raising
2. expanding social outreach
3. sensitizing social service institutions and hospitals

C. Resources

1. shared scriptures
2. funding and information sources

D. Conclusions

1. the powerful impact of relationship
2. Muslim and Christian women bring peace to Liberia