

THE CHALLENGES OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

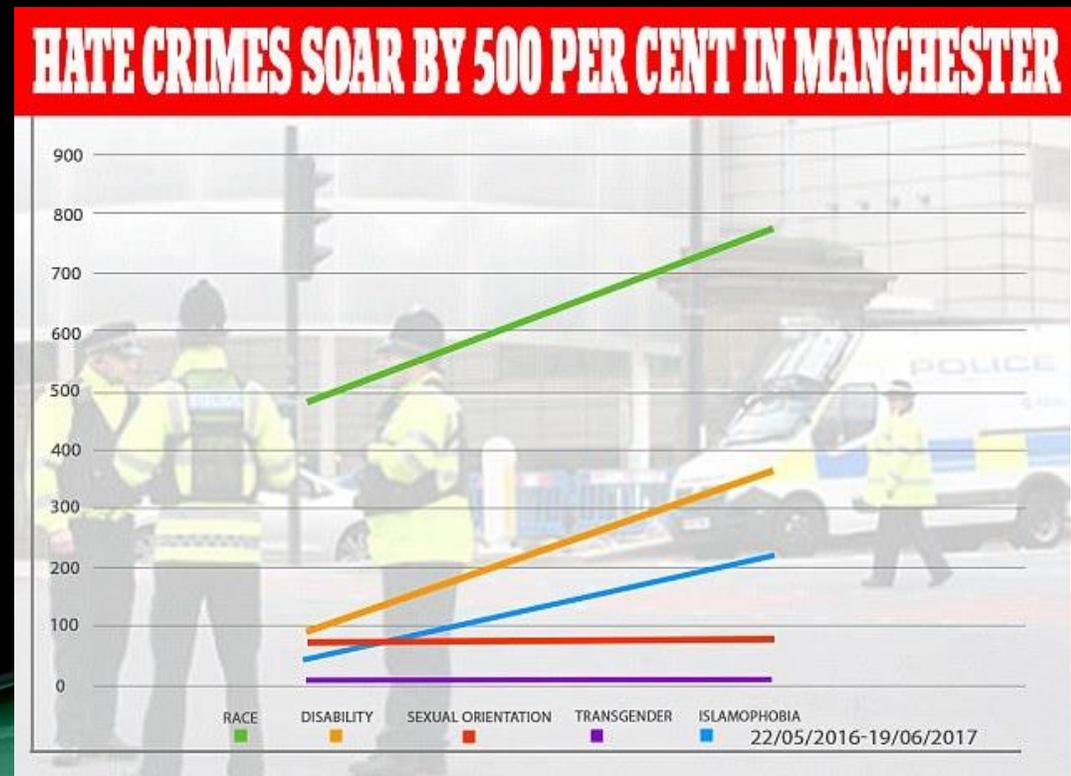
Kevin Quigley



TASK 1

The recent atrocities in Manchester and London have led to an increase in hate crimes and tension within communities. In your table group discuss:

- any issues that may have arisen in your school related to this and how your community has responded.
- the critical role played by schools in promoting community cohesion



EXTRACTS FROM CONCILIAR DOCUMENTS



“The Catholic Church rejects nothing....

1a.that is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men and women.” N.A.2.

EXTRACTS FROM CONCILIAR DOCUMENTS



“The Catholic Church rejects nothing....

1b. “Yet it proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. (John 1:6)” N.A.2.

1c. “The Church therefore urges its sons and daughters to enter with prudence and with charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians whilst witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths among non Christians, together with their social life and culture.” N.A.2.

EXTRACTS FROM CONCILIAR DOCUMENTS

2. Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will, as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – these too may attain eternal salvation. L.G. 16

3. All this holds true not only for Christians but also for all people of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. For since Christ died for everyone, and since all are called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal Mystery. G.S. 22



EXTRACTS FROM CONCILIAR DOCUMENTS

4. **To recognise by God's Providence elements which are true and good (in other religions.)** O.T. 16

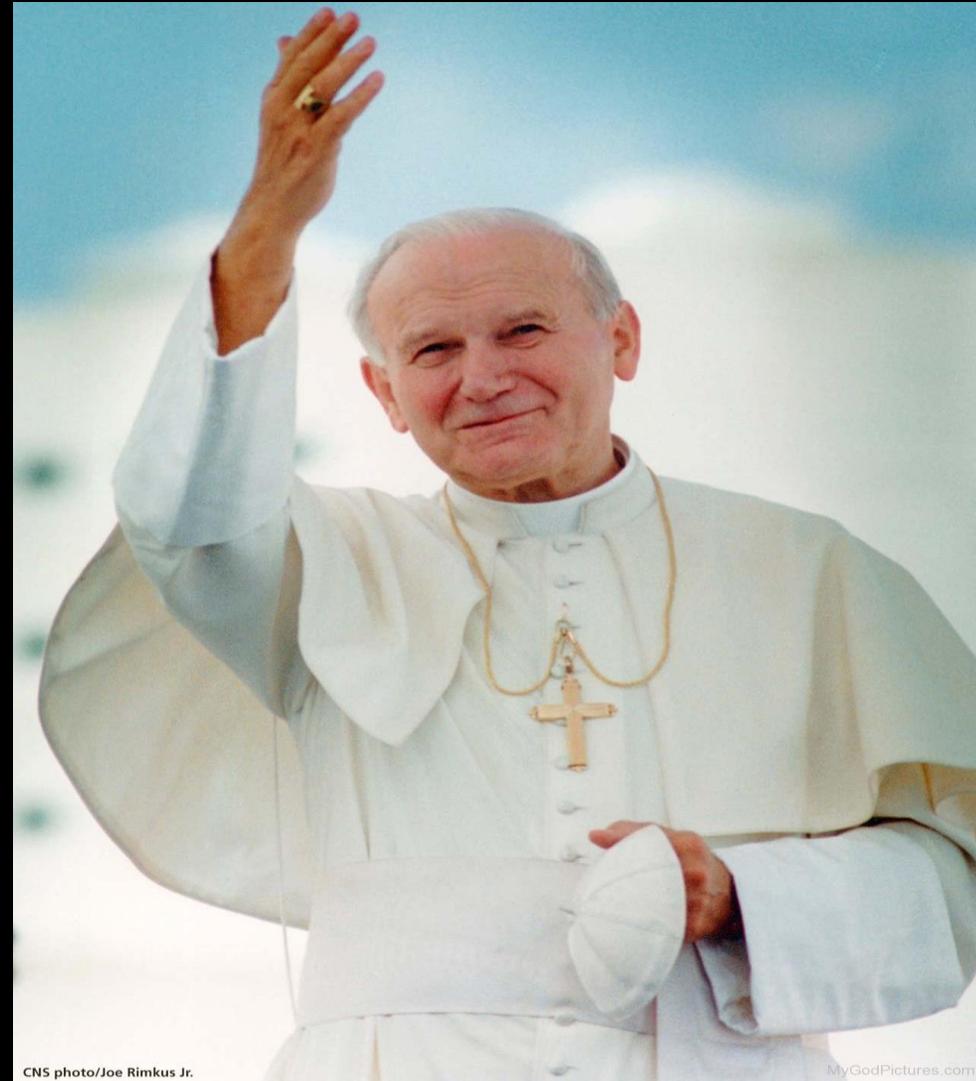
5. **Our thoughts also go out to all who acknowledge God and who preserve precious religious and human elements in their Traditions; it is our hope that frank dialogue will spur us all on to receive the impulses of the Spirit and act upon them.** G.S.92

6. **“elements of truth and grace which are found among people and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God.”** A.G. 9



POPE JOHN PAUL II ON INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

“Let us see in it an anticipation of what God would like the developing history of humanity to be : a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another towards the transcendent goal which sets us free.”



Assisi 1986 at the end of a day of Prayer Fasting and Pilgrimage for Peace with the Leaders of World Religions

POPE JOHN PAUL II ON INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

“Those engaged in this dialogue must be consistent with their own religious traditions and convictions, and be open to understanding those of the other party without pretence or close-mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side. There must be no abandonment of principles nor false irenicism, but instead a witness given and received for mutual advancement on the road of religious inquiry and experience, and at the same time for elimination of prejudice, intolerance and misunderstandings.” **Redemptoris Missio 56**



TASK 2

A group of parents has written to you expressing their opposition to their children participating in a visit to the local mosque organised by your school. They seem to have been influenced by a recent campaign by a certain political party.

In your table group offer 5 bullet-points that would form the basis of your response to these complaints.

DELEGATES' RESPONSE

- **The Church teaches that we are ALL created in the image and likeness of God. This is NOT dependent upon being 'one of us'.**
- **We are concerned with the TRUTH about other faiths – not with unreliable facts. Ignorance is destructive of trust; the truth is freedom!**
- **Our school promotes community cohesion. This is an opportunity to seek understanding of other faiths.**
- **Catholic schools are founded on the core values of service, tolerance, compassion, respect and love. Christ is at the centre of all decisions made by the school – (see mission statement). Parents send their children to this school on the understanding that we are inclusive and that all are welcome**
- **This is an opportunity for leadership and growth, parents who object should be invited into school to explore their views and possibly to take part in the visit.**

FR DALY'S LETTER

Dear Parent/Carer

I understand that in the light of recent events there is concern among some parents about our visit to our local Mosque. As your priest, please allow me to explain why this visit is so important,

When you entrusted your children to our school, you did so knowing that they would receive an education inspired by the teachings of the Gospel of Jesus, as handed down in the Catholic Faith. All of you have supported the school in teaching your children the Christian religion as expressed in the Catholic Faith. Many of you have seen your children confirmed as Catholics and receive their First Holy Communion. You and we have taught them their prayers and how to celebrate the seasons of the Church's year.

Why, then, are we taking them to a Mosque? Simply because learning about other faiths, and respecting what we recognise as good and true and beautiful in them, is a key part of Catholic education. The Church explains it like this: after speaking of the Jewish people, for whom Catholics have the most profound respect, the Church goes on to say: *"The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims. They profess to hold the faith of Abraham and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day".*

To put it simply, we help our children to have an understanding of other faiths BECAUSE we are Catholics and ours is a Catholic school. We condemn everything carried out by extremists of all faiths, whether Muslim, Christian or whatever. We need to help our children to recognise that the vast majority of followers of all the world's major religions are as peace-loving as you or me. To do otherwise would be to fail in our duty as a Catholic school and to ill-equip your children for life in a multi-faith world.

I know that some parents have said that the visit is ill-timed because of recent events. Those events are totally evil. They do not represent the views of British Muslims or indeed of Muslims anywhere. They are the actions of the most extreme of terrorists. To brand all Muslims, or indeed all people of Asian or Arab

descent, as 'suspects' is as wrong as branding all Irish people or indeed all Catholics as 'suspects' in the days of the Troubles in Ireland.

Our visit to the Mosque is something I look forward to each year and I will be joining the children on Monday. Muslim children attend our places of worship so it is only courtesy to allow them to show us theirs. The staff at the Mosque give us a fascinating tour aimed at breaking down barriers. We are also planning to visit the Jewish Museum in Manchester. The local clergy, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Baptist are arranging a visit to the Mosque themselves, followed possibly by a return visit from local imams.

I think it would help if we arranged a similar visit by any parents who have a sincere openness to learn and to break down barriers. If you would like to be part of such a visit please let me know.

I do hope you will accept my explanation and, with me, be part of the process of breaking down barriers above all in our minds and helping the children be channels of peace in a fractured world. As I mentioned earlier, this is part of what it means to offer your children a Catholic education, a choice you made for your children when you brought them for baptism or when you enrolled them in a Catholic school.

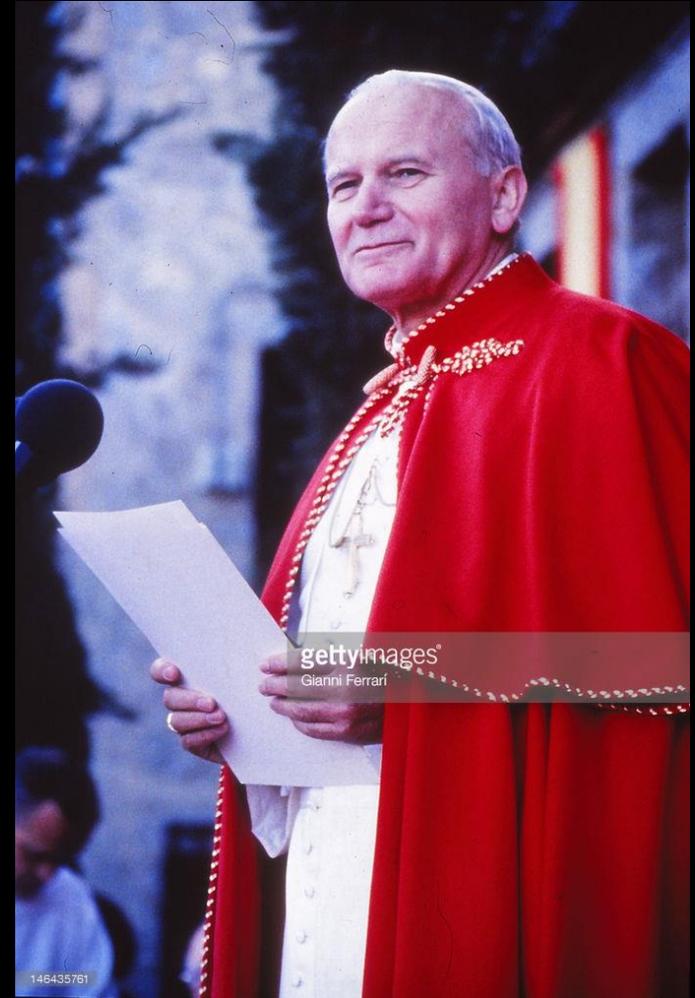
I will leave the final word to Pope Francis who said recently to leaders of different faiths: *"Authentic religion is a source peace and not of violence. No one must use the name of God to commit violence! To kill in the name of God is a grave sacrilege. We must not regard every man or woman, even of different religious traditions, as rivals, less still as enemies, but rather as brothers and sisters. When a person is secure in his or her own beliefs, there is no need to impose or put pressure on others. Deep down, we are all pilgrims on this earth, and on this pilgrim journey....We need each other and are entrusted to each other's care"*

May I thank you for reading this letter and for giving it your prayerful consideration.

Yours sincerely

POPE JOHN PAUL II ON INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

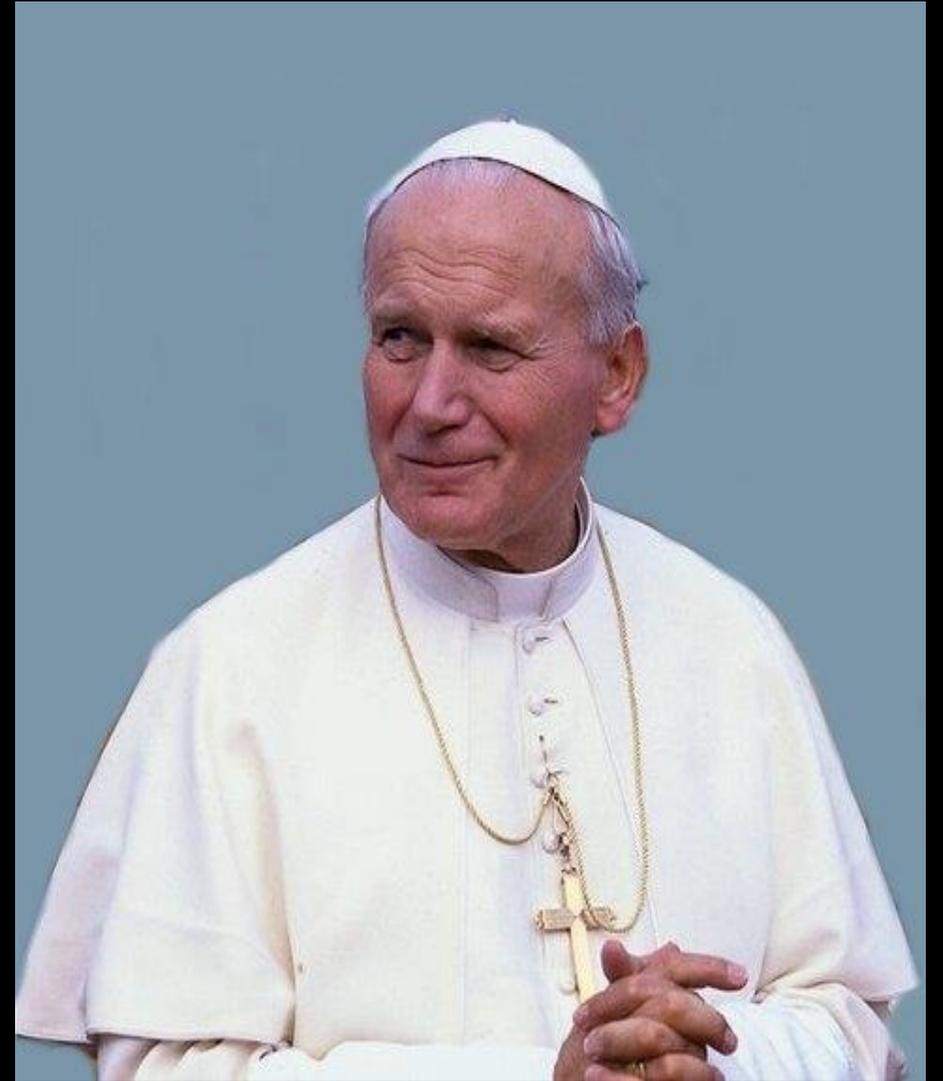
“In the climate of increased cultural and religious pluralism which is expected to mark the society of the new millennium, it is obvious that this dialogue will be specially important in establishing a sure basis for peace and warding off the dread spectre of those wars of religions which have so often bloodied human history. The name of the one God must become increasingly what it is: a name of peace and a summons to peace.”



Apostolic letter: Novo Millenio Ineunte to mark the beginning of the new Millenium

POPE JOHN PAUL II ON INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

“Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity. It is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where He wills. Through dialogue the Church seeks to uncover the ‘seeds of the Word’, a ray of that Truth which enlightens everyone’, these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of humankind.”



Apostolic letter: Novo Millenio Ineunte to mark the beginning of the new Millenium

THE NATURE OF DIALOGUE

“Dialogue cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and recreation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. It is thus necessarily the task of responsible subjects and cannot exist in a relation of domination ... Because love is an act of courage not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause..... And this commitment is because loving is dialogical.”

Paulo Friere



THE NATURE OF DIALOGUE

“There can be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There can be no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. There can be no dialogue between the religions without research into theological foundations.”

Hans Kung



FORMS OF DIALOGUE

1. Dialogues of life

2. Dialogue of daily life

3. Dialogues of works and actions

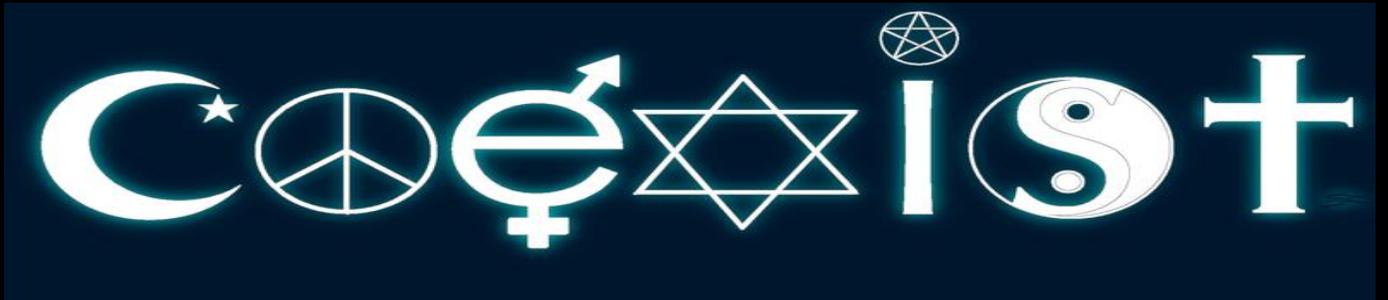
4. Dialogue of experts and theological exchange

5. Dialogue of religious experiences



OBSTACLES TO DIALOGUE

1. “Dialogue wants me to convert to the religion of the other. It’s a matter of betrayal of my faith !!”
2. “Our differences are so irreconcilable that it is not worth the effort to work on them!”
3. “This dialogue does not allow me to express myself!!”
4. “We don’t need dialogue to live as ... Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists etc - Why bother!”
5. “Dialogue is all words and no action! There is never any progress; it’s a waste of time, effort and resources!”
6. “We’ve tried all this before!”



NOW LET'S LOOK AT THE OBJECTIONS IN A LITTLE MORE DETAIL

1. Insufficient formation in one's own religion.

2. Insufficient knowledge and understanding of another's.

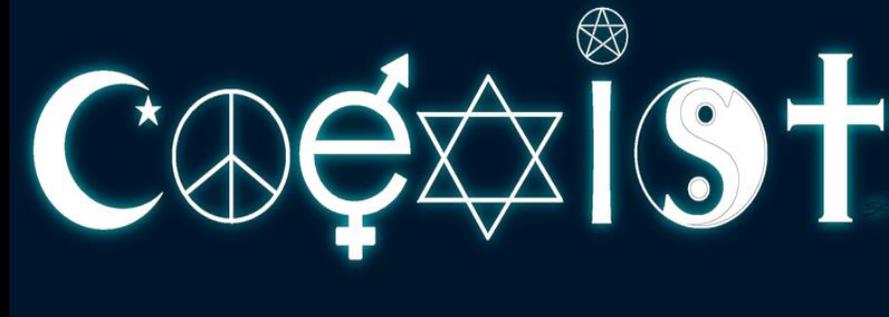
3. Cultural differences and the lack of tools for dialogue across cultural boundaries

4. Socio-political factors - given our global context and the extent of pluralism

5. A poor understanding of the meaning of Dialogue

6. A self sufficiency, lack of openness, and defensiveness of one's own religious position.

TRUTH WILL ALWAYS BE
TRUTH, REGARDLESS OF
LACK OF
UNDERSTANDING,
DISBELIEF OR
IGNORANCE.



- 7. A lack of enthusiasm for and appreciation of the value of interreligious dialogue**
- 8. Suspicion about the motives of the other in dialogue.**
- 9. Obstacles from a polemical position when expressing one's own religious convictions**
- 10. A growing antipathy and intolerance due to current global factors Eg radical Islam**
- 11. The challenge of atheistic secularism particularly in the West and the unrelenting attempts to remove religion from the public square.**
- 12. Ingrained longstanding obstacles from within institutional and organised religions themselves eg apathy**



A CHECK LIST FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN SCHOOL CONTEXTS



P E A C E



A CHECK LIST FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN SCHOOL CONTEXTS

Provide ...a hospitable space

...a safe space for dialogue and dissent

...clear ground rules and boundaries for dialogue

...clarity as to the language and terms used

...a whole school approach based on a whole school policy

...a sacred space (s) for prayer and worship



A CHECK LIST FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN SCHOOL CONTEXTS

Encourage...the pupils' self esteem and confidence in expressing their own identities within their religious traditions



...the pupils' respect for the identities of their fellow pupils from different religious traditions



A CHECK LIST FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN SCHOOL CONTEXTS

A ctively ...involve the pupils in the learning processes



...encourage their abilities to critique what is on offer and to come to informed positions and wise judgement and understanding

...involve them in the monitoring and evaluation of the learning activities

...involve them in live encounters with representatives of the major religions, by visits, twinning arrangements or shared experiences

...engage with the elements that differ within the major religions traditions



A CHECK LIST FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN SCHOOL CONTEXTS

C

Celebrate the pupils' religious identities .

Cherish the 'religious capital' the pupils bring

Contribute to their growing understanding and

appreciation of the value of all the major religious traditions for the common good.

Communicate and celebrate the commonalities of the major religions traditions

Counter the myths and stereotypes surrounding the major world religions, including, in particular, anti-Semitism, Islamaphobia,

Christiana phobia and the growing fundamentalism and radicalisation in certain distortions of the major world faiths.



A CHECK LIST FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN SCHOOL CONTEXTS

Encourage



- ... skills in and a spirit of dialogue of discernment within and of bridge building across , the major religious traditions**
- ... the pupils in empathy, in emotional and religious literacy in a spirit of bonding, bridging and linking of the major religious traditions and of what they all hold in common**



TASK 3

Again in your table group offer 5 bullet-points that would form the basis of a set of guidelines for your pupils that would help to promote interreligious dialogue in your school and in your community.



GUIDELINES FOR DIALOGUE FOR PUPILS



1. We will listen to what everyone has to say
2. We will be honest in what we say
3. We will respect other peoples' views even when we disagree with them
4. We will not tell other pupils what they believe but allow them, to tell us
5. We will acknowledge both similarities and difference between our religions
6. We will not judge people here by what some people of their religions do
7. We will not try to force others to agree with our views
8. We will ask for a discussion to be stopped if we feel uncomfortable with what is being said
9. We will make every effort to get along with everyone regardless of their religion, gender, race or age.



“Dear friends, I am convinced that the followers of the various religious traditions have an essential role to play in the delicate process of reconciliation and rebuilding which is taking place in this country. For that process to succeed, all members of society must work together; all must have a voice. All must be free to express their concerns, their needs, their aspirations and their fears. Most importantly, they must be prepared to accept one another. To respect legitimate diversities, and learn to live as one family.

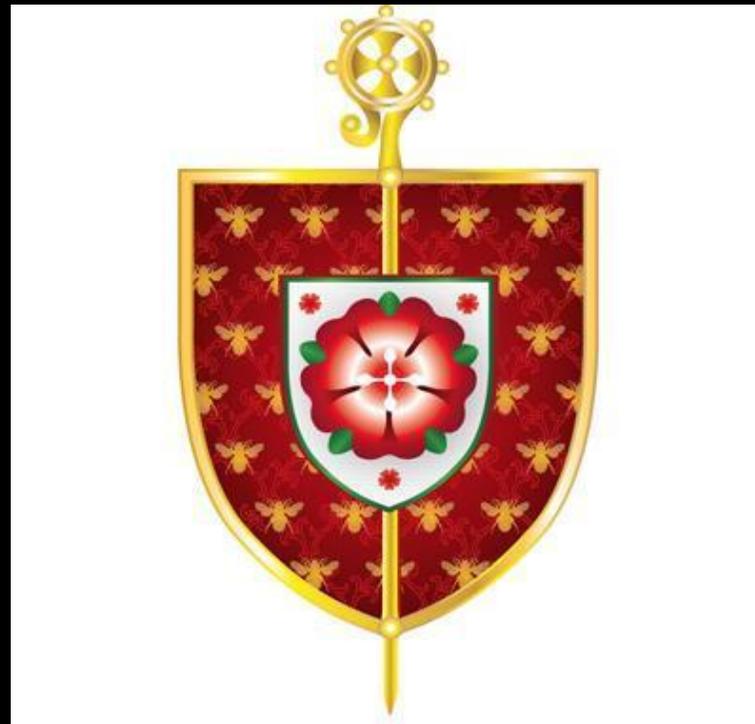


Whenever people listen to one another humbly and openly, their shared values and aspirations become all the more apparent. Diversity is no longer seen as a threat, but as a source of enrichment. The path to justice, reconciliation and social harmony becomes all the more clearly seen”.

Pope Francis January 2014 on a visit to Sri Lanka

GUIDELINES FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN AN INTERRELIGIOUS CONTEXT

DIOCESE OF SALFORD



Dignity

Inclusivity

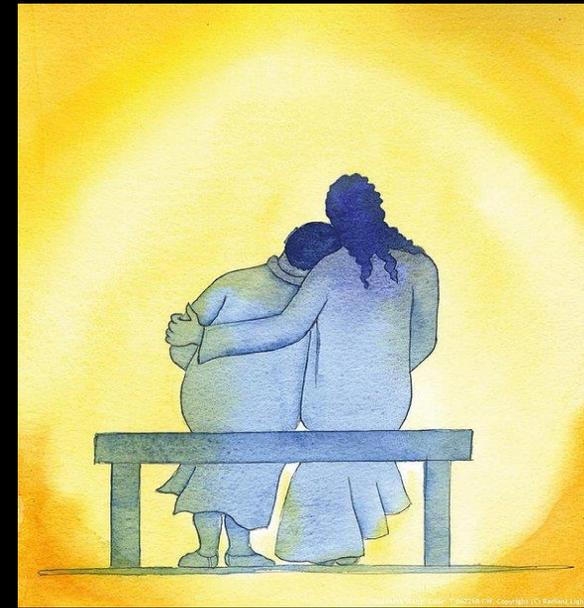
Openness

Christ/ Choice / Conversation / Community / Common Good

Evangelisation

Service/ Spirituality / Stewards

Engage/ embrace/ encounter/ exchange/ enrich/ encourage



Our schools are called to be like oases in the desert
Father

Salvation
Authenticity
Love
Family



Our schools are a gift from the Church to the world
Relationship/Respect/Reconciliation
Dialogue