

NMS Resource Document on Christian-Muslim Relations

Introduction

The existing NMS Policy Document on Mission to Muslims (PD) dates from 1994. The following text is not intended to replace the PD, but should be read as an additional short Resource Document for our current work, with references to some resources in a separate attachment.

1 Dialogue and peace building (Conviviality)

Dialogue and peace building initiatives are critical in fostering mutual understanding and respect between Christians and Muslims, especially against the backdrop of our long history of violent encounters. Conviviality, the ability to live together harmoniously despite differences, is a crucial aspect of peace building. While acknowledging the differences between the two religions, it is also important to note and appreciate the many common beliefs and values that we share.

For example, in Cameroon the good relations between the missionaries and the traditional local leaders have secured good working conditions for the church.

Dialogue and peace building does not rule out respectful Christian witness, as it is also stated in the Arusha call to Discipleship: «We are called to be faithful witnesses of God's transforming love in dialogue with people of other faiths in a world where the politicization of religious identities often causes conflict.»

2 The Christian witness in Muslim contexts

According to NMS' foundational document «Love never ends», the church participates in God's mission to the whole world, «regardless of faith, nationality, or social status. The task of mission will therefore be to try to reach everyone with the message of God's love» (2.2). The Accra Statement of the Lausanne Movement (2014) provides further Biblical and theological foundations for Christian engagement with Muslims and with Islam (part I), while the ecumenical document "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct" (WCC 2011) provides general practical guidelines that are relevant to Muslim contexts.

There are some special challenges related to the Christian witness in Muslim contexts. These include, but are not limited to:

- Doctrinal challenges (e.g. the Trinity, the person of Christ)
- Cultural sensitivity / conflict awareness
- Contextual variations
- Political development
- Ethics and morals
- Gender
- Migration

3 Support and fellowship towards new believers

New believers from a Muslim background (BMBs) need special support. They often face persecution and ostracization, and hence need to be included in new social fellowships or to receive pastoral care in their old social setting.

New fellowships are often needed due to cultural differences, language barriers and security issues. Sometimes the cultural difference between local, traditional churches and majority society can be

large. Worship in minority churches is often conducted in another language than the majority culture. Established churches are often subject to government scrutiny, and the leadership might be afraid to take in believers with a Muslim background. In cases like this it may sometimes be wise to form separate fellowships for new believers, although it is always a goal to maintain strong links to the wider Christian community.

4 Freedom of religion or belief (FoRB)

Human rights are challenged in many Muslim majority areas, “and both Christians and others can be persecuted for the sake of their faith” (*Love never ends*, 2.3). The church needs especially to uphold these rights from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

- Freedom to choose/change religion (article 18)
- Freedom of expression (article 19)
- Freedom to gather (article 20)

How are these rights challenged today, and what is our response?

- Freedom to choose: Many Muslim countries have legal restrictions on the freedom to convert from Islam to another religion. We need to support persecuted converts and uphold their rights.
- Freedom of expression is often challenged by a general censorship on media. Pakistani blasphemy laws are particularly strict, and minorities are targeted disproportionately. Human rights clearly include the right to propagate one's own religious views.
- The freedom to gather is restricted many places. Churches are closed down and it is difficult to build new churches or repair old ones. House churches are considered illegal many places, and believers who gather illegally need our support.

Team CMR will be providing additional resources to each of the topics covered above.

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