



Primer on the World Interfaith Harmony Week

1) Q. What is the "World Interfaith Harmony Week"?

A. The United Nations (UN) on October 20, 2010, recognizing the need for dialogue among different faiths and religions and their contribution for peace in the world, proclaimed the first week of February of every year "World Interfaith Harmony Week" between all religions, faiths and beliefs. The UN encourages "all States to support, on a voluntary basis, the spread of the interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world's churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other places of worship during the week. The celebration is based on the love of God and love of one's neighbor or on love of good and love of one's neighbor, each according to their own religious traditions or convictions (for more details see Google – world interfaith harmony week).

2) Q. Why do we promote this special week?

A. Because we believe in the spirit of this initiative. It unites us with many in the world who are joining together to rediscover and celebrate "Interfaith Harmony" guided by the basic principles/ commandment of the love of God and the love of neighbor. This special week is gaining great attention in the world and is a sign of hope.

3) Q. There are already many other initiatives of dialogue and peace, why this new one?

A. The United Nations as an international body realized that there is a need for a specific attention on the "interfaith harmony" guided by the love of God and the love of neighbor. This is a move toward a more "spiritual approach to dialogue and peace". The United Nations is convinced now more than ever that development and peace without "love" cannot be achieved in the world. Thus, it is a new paradigm of dialogue and peace that finds many willing to rediscover and celebrate together "harmony among God's People".

4) Q. Is this celebration for all or only for Muslims/Christians?

A. The United Nations invites all countries and religions to celebrate this interfaith harmony week, including indigenous people and even non-believers. However, in this primer we focus our attention on Muslims / Christians who represent the two largest religions in the world and are the largest presence in the Philippines, especially in Mindanao. We are convinced that in the heart of each person there is a felt need to celebrate the love of God in order to rediscover the love of neighbor in all religions and cultures as part of the human family "linked" to God, the common creator.

5) Q. What about the issues that we need to face in the Philippines, especially in Mindanao related to the recognition of historical rights, poverty and peace?

A. The World Interfaith Harmony Week celebration does not directly face these issues. This is not to ignore them, but we believe that this new approach can bring people closer to each other and motivate them to face together all the issues of society with a "new spirit". Thus, this celebration is an opportunity to rebuild love, friendship, sincerity, sensitivity and solidarity. In one word, the initiative can create "harmony" starting from our personal faith and belief in life. It is a spiritual approach to dialogue and peace as an expression of "love". This is needed today as a foundation of all the issues for a sustainable peace in our society.

6) Q. Christianity and Islam are two different religious movements; in "celebrating harmony" is it better to emphasize the common points or the differences?

A. The basic principles of interfaith dialogue and harmony among people of different faiths are to approach others with Sincerity, Sensitivity and Solidarity (three S). Thus, the celebration has to be an expression of "sincerity", guided by "sensitivity" in order to promote "solidarity". This spirit of dialogue is in order to develop different dimensions and attitudes: "Courage" in those who are convinced of the importance of interfaith harmony, "Appreciation" of what we have in common, "Respect" of our differences, and "Example" in order to move together guided by the common good of our society (acronym C.A.R.E.).

7) Q. What can we answer to those who are afraid of this form of dialogue and confuse it with “syncretism” and, as a result, they say that Christians and Muslims are almost the same and one can easily change religion, especially if one finds the change advantageous for one reason or another?

A. No, the mixture of different religious beliefs or syncretism, and the attitude of some who use dialogue in order to convert others is not genuine dialogue. Dialogue first of all is a spirituality and not a strategy. Real dialogue brings us to love and respect the differences, convinced that dialogue is the attitude of God in creation and in all the manifestations of life where we find commonalities and differences. Love cares for all and respects all. Real dialogue is expressed in an attitude of love which celebrates the love of God in freedom. Thus, dialogue is an expression of the love which is the “goal” of dialogue and in the process love becomes also the “means” that can bring people to the final goal that is peace on earth and in heaven.

8) Q. There is always the tendency of the majority religious groups in a country to put down minority groups; this is true also in the Philippines where in some places Christians are the majority and in some other places Muslims are the majority. What can we do?

A. This is one of the great challenges of today. People of dialogue have to help overcome prejudices and biases among religions and share more about the common good of not only one group or religion, but of society as a whole. If we believe in solidarity, freedom of religion, respect, harmony and peace we can “dream” that the time will come when majority and minority will respect and help each other, in Europe, in Arabic countries, in China, and even in the Philippines, in Manila, in Marawi, in Davao, in Jolo, in Zamboanga, in Basilan, etc. This should be born out of respect based on the fundamental rights of each person and on love, not out of respect based on fear or vested interest.

APPENDIX 1

	BIBLICAL QUOTATION	QUR'ANIC QUOTATION
PEACE	Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. (1st Peter 3:11)	“Peace!” a word (of salutation) from a Lord Most Merciful! (Surah 36:58)
PRAISE	Praise is due to You, O God of Zion; and to you shall vows be performed, O You who hears prayers. (Psalm 65:1)	Therefore be patient of what they say, and using the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before the setting. (Surah 50:39)
SUFFERING	He who will not take up his cross after me is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:38)	Whenever we sent a prophet to a town, we took up its people in suffering and adversity, in order that they might learn humility. (Surah 7:94)
KINDNESS	But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy and patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)	Kind words and the covering of faults are better than charity followed by injury. (Surah 2:263)
PATIENCE	Because you are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourself with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness and patience. (Colossian 4:12)	Nay, seek (God's) help with patient perseverance and prayer. It is indeed hard, except to those who bring a lowly spirit. (Surah 2:45)
OBEDIENCE	Children obey your parents for this is right. Honor your father and your mother. (Eph. 6:1-2)	And obey God and the Messenger, that ye obtain mercy. (Surah 3:132)
HONESTY	This is what you must do! Speak the truth to one another. Let those who judge give peace through honest sentences. (Zech. 8:16)	Give full measure when you measure and weigh with a balance that is straight. (Surah 17:35)
LOVE	I give you a new commandment: Love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know you for my disciples: your love for one another. (John 13:34-35)	And be steadfast in prayer and regular in charity: And whatever good ye send forth for your souls, before you, ye shall find it with God: for God sees Well all that ye do. (Surah 4:10)