

Statement of the Participants of the Consultation on Anglican-Lutheran-Buddhist Relations Yangon, Myanmar 16-20 January, 2017

Preamble

We the participants of the consultation on Anglican-Lutheran- Buddhist Relations met from the 16th to 20th January 2017 in Yangon, Myanmar focusing on the theme 'Voices of Hope in a New Era'. The consultation, which took place during the Week of Prayer for Christian unity, was jointly organized by the Network for Interfaith Concerns, Lutheran World Federation, the World Council of Churches, the United Society Partners in the Gospel, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and supported by the Scottish Episcopal Church and The Spalding Trust. Also present was the Undersecretary for the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The consultation was attended by Christians from the Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Roman Catholic traditions, and Buddhists from the Theravada and Mahayana traditions. The participants acknowledge with gratitude the gracious and generous hospitality received from the local hosts - the Church of the Province of Myanmar. Their example set the tone for the spirit of honesty and respect that characterized our time together.

Over the course of the four days we gained knowledge and understanding of each other's contexts, practices and convictions. Our experience of listening to and learning from each other was enriched by the sharing of expertise and experience through academic presentations, stories and conversations. These were complemented by a visit to the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University to learn from the scholarly community there. We were blessed by a creative and imaginative cultural program presented by students from Holy Cross Theological College and the Mary Chapman School.

A dialogue of spiritual engagement occurred through four Bible studies one of which was jointly led by a Buddhist and a Christian as well as Buddhist presence at Christian worship and Christian presence at Buddhist meditation. We found that shared silence was possible but recognized that our understanding and practice of worship are different and, therefore, we did not participate in each other's worship. Whilst Christians were appreciative of the graciousness with which the Buddhists participated in a primarily Christian event within which they were a minority; the Buddhists appreciated the positive attitude by the Christians towards Buddhists in inviting them to consultation.

We also recognized that we met at significant moment in Myanmar's history which made the hosting of an international consultation of this nature possible.

Scriptures:

Two key Scriptures were jointly reflected on and informed our discussions:

'Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is an eternal law.' Dhammapada v.5

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' Luke 10:27

Themes:

Three strong themes - humility, honesty and humanity - which emerged from the conference are offered to our constituencies to encourage further Christian-Buddhist encounters.

Humility:

We recognise that this consultation built on relationships already established between Christians and Buddhists in Myanmar and elsewhere. Building relationships is a long process involving hard work and often subject to set backs and disappointments.

We share the common conviction that lack of knowledge of each other and resultant lack of understanding is, not only unhelpful, but also actively harmful in any type of human relationship including between Buddhists and Christians.

We recognise that the Christians in the West have much to learn from the experience, theology and teaching of Christians in Asia, especially given the increased Buddhist influence and presence in the West.

We recognise that interreligious dialogue can enrich, challenge and energize our faith through the questions and experiences shared when Buddhists and Christians encounter one another. We also recognise the importance of not imposing negative interpretations of each other's beliefs

Our conversations helped us recognise how inter-religious questions could be a means to foster intra-Christian and intra-Buddhist unity.

Honesty:

We acknowledged the importance of listening to diverse voices, from the past and present, both painful and positive so that we can learn lessons which enable us to move towards reconciliation and mutual understanding.

We recognise that, whilst we share much in common, there are also radical differences and issues of contention. The careful exploration of differences and similarities can help to overcome prejudice and lead to a greater appreciation of our own faith and the faith of others and enhance the experience of dialogue.

Humanity:

Throughout the consultation there was a constant reiteration of the need for the recognition of our shared humanity, both as a response to suffering and an impetus for solidarity and social action.

The interreligious responses to the shared crises facing humanity become effective when both academic and grass roots voices are heard and held in balance. This includes a commitment to hear from minorities and those whose voice is usually excluded from interreligious conversation.

Our experience in Myanmar has taught us that interreligious dialogue cannot ignore issues of politics, ethnicity and culture

In a world where migration and its associated fear of the 'other' pose threats for hospitable and harmonious living, we were reminded that both Buddhism and Christianity inspire us care for the stranger in our midst.

We perceive consultations like this as healthy and helpful in pursuing our common goals of working for the welfare and happiness of the people whose lives are intimately bound as representatives of religions.

Conclusion

We wish to thank the Church in the Province in Myanmar for hosting this event. Our hope is that the example of the people of Myanmar and the participants in this consultation will inspire Buddhists and Christians in other contexts to engage in this process of meeting, listening and learning; and that through this new friendships and communities of peace will grow.

As part of our common journey for the future we envisage:

Joint collaboration on projects of common concern

Intentional fostering of Christian Buddhist Dialogue at the leadership and grassroots levels

Greater engagement between Buddhist and Christian academic and religious institutions

In regard to future consultations we recommend the following:

Inclusive planning involving Buddhists and Christians from different traditions

Equal participation from women and men

Inclusion of Buddhist and Christian Scriptures for reflection and study

List of Participants