

POINTS FOR PEACEMAKING

Christian religious leaders have conferred frequently among themselves and with colleagues of other faiths about ways to work together to encourage the cessation of violence, and to promote peace with justice between Israelis and Palestinians. One strategy on which leaders concur is to use these "talking points for peacemaking." Because these points for peacemaking are ethical "middle axioms," they should apply to any context where conflict exists or is threatened—such as with Iraq and in initiatives to counter terrorism. What follows are short, memorable phrases that embody these points. We encourage people of faith to refer to these points repeatedly in private and public conversations, in written statements and in verbal presentations, among Christians and with Jews and Muslims, here, in the Middle East, and beyond. All those who have participated in developing this strategy hope that these points can be used to help Christians, Jews, and Muslims address current crises and avoid future conflicts.*

Christians, Jews, and Muslims believe that our survival as peoples is dependent on adherence to the core principles of our faiths. As members of faith communities, we affirm that the search for a just peace in the Middle East, as well as in all conflicts among peoples and nations, requires acknowledgment of, and adherence to, these shared principles:

1. Our shared heritage as children of God, of Adam and Eve, and of Abraham, commanded to love God and one another.
 - Lift up common values. In the face of those who attempt to use religion to divide, we affirm to one another, and to the world, the shared principles for peace and unity that are central teachings of our scriptures and traditions. We recognize the need to engage in dialogue with or to challenge those in our own faith communities who do not affirm these common values.
 - Do not demonize the Other. People of faith should not demonize those of other faiths, or those who hold opposing views, as inherently evil. Respect human rights. Basic human rights and dignity must be respected regardless of the behavior or beliefs of the individual or group.
 - Avoid prejudicial stereotyping. Criticism of policies or actions of opponents in a conflict should avoid appeals to prejudice toward religious, racial, or ethnic groups.
 - Pray for enemies. People of faith pray for our enemies, and seek reconciliation.
2. Our shared heritage as ethical religions –God's will is for a just and moral order.
 - Promote justice. Justice is the restoration of right relationships both with God and with one another, in inter-personal, religious, political, and economic relations.
 - Resist revenge. Justice must not be confused with revenge and retribution.
 - Affirm that just ends are reached by just means. Unjust behavior cannot be excused as serving a higher good.
 - Adhere to moral principles. Citizens who also are people of faith should encourage their governments to honor agreements, and remain committed to basic moral values.
 - Support critical self reflection. Recognize that participants in faith communities, themselves, sometimes have fostered negativity. This needs to be acknowledged. We seek repentance, amendment of ways, and forgiveness.
 - Respect international law. As members of a global family, we should hold each other accountable to international laws, many of which are derived from commonly agreed upon ethical standards in our religious communities.
 - Encourage peace talks without prior conditions. Setting prior conditions tends to delay peace talks, which is contrary to the mandate of faith traditions to seek peace and pursue it.
 - Do not empower extremists by abandoning agreements. Threats to abandon agreements due to violations empower extremists to disrupt any just-peace seeking process.

- Protect civilian non-combatants. All violence and human rights violations against civilian non-combatants are immoral. Crimes against humanity do not justify crimes against humanity.
- Avoid double standards. When criticizing or praising behaviors and policies, all parties in a conflict are held to the same standards.

3. Our shared belief in God's will as peace, both spiritual and temporal.

- Stay grounded in the peace of God. To bring a convincing word of peace into situations of conflict, peacemakers must be rooted in God's peace, in order to sustain themselves in the face of daunting obstacles.
- Affirm that peacemaking is a process, a way of thinking, and of being in relationships, as well as the final goal.
- Be active in the pursuit of peace. A peacemaking spirit is not passive, but draws us into conflict with a reconciling intention, modeling reconciling behaviors. Along with our prayers and petitions to God, we act in the pursuit of peace.