

WÜRTTEMBERGISCHE EVANGELISCHE LANDESSYNODE
(Synod of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg)

Declaration

Learning To Live With One Another

Protestant Christians and Muslims in Württemberg

At a special conference that took place on 24 March 2006, the Synod of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg debated the relationships between Christians and Muslims under the title "Islam in Wuerttemberg – Learning to live with one another".

Muslims will remain our neighbours in the long run. In ecumenical association with other European churches and with approval of the Charta Oecumenica, our regional church has already undertaken a pledge:

- "to conduct ourselves towards Muslims with respect;
- and to work together with Muslims on matters of common concern." (Art. 11).

The Synod regards an active participation in the dialogue with Muslims in our region as the long-term duty of the regional church.

This dialogue should not exclude the issue concerning the truth of faith; indeed, it should be open to mutual witness. The fact is that, without awareness of the truth of Christian faith that receives its truth from Jesus Christ, no genuine meeting or genuine dialogue can take place¹.

1. As Protestant Christians our guide concerning relations with Muslims is to be found in Jesus Christ and the Gospels.

- a) In the Gospel, Jesus reminds us of the commandment to love in the Old Testament: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18; Luke 10:25 et seq.).

Since God's love applies to all people without restriction, our attentions towards other people according to Jesus' will should not be limited or linked to any preconditions (Matthew 5:43 et seq.; Luke 6:27 et seq.).

- b) The Bible instructs us: "... always [be] prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..." (1 Peter 3:15).

The points of common ground and differences between these two monotheistic religions will come to light by talking to each other. What we have in common is our connection to a single God and a holy scripture. However, the difference is a belief in the Holy Trinity and its revelation in Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world, and a different understanding of the Bible and the Qu'ran.

The common duty is to search for ways of understanding and peace. In accordance with the Biblical instruction "But seek the welfare of the city..., and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:7), it is one of the duties of our church congregations to promote the peaceful co-existence of people of different cultures and religions.

¹ Land Bishop Jüly in his episcopal report of 13.07.2006, page 17.

2. We encourage our church congregations

- a) to empower congregation members to talk about their faith in qualified and understandable terms;
- b) to approach Muslim neighbours;
- c) to create the possibilities of meeting and exchanging information;
- d) to discover areas of common ground and differences and to address them, for example, concepts of God and human beings, relationship between religion and politics, human rights, the organisation of public life and participation in social duties;
- e) not to avoid difficult subjects, e.g. the position of Christian minorities in countries with a Muslim majority; the issue of world-wide social justice; the situation of converts in Germany;
- f) to promote dialogue at the level of church congregations and Muslim communities, e.g. at meetings in kindergartens, in women's work, in youth work or adult education;
- g) to support efforts by communities, schools and associations towards integration and to offer the support of the church;

3. We recommend our church districts

- a) to work together with other Christian churches in matters concerning relationships between Christianity and Islam;
- b) to form interreligious discussion and work groups;
- c) to support ministers in the pastoral care of interreligious families;

4. We join in the appeal by the Evangelical Church in Baden to Muslim communities:

- 1. We ask Muslim communities to support the pilot experiment on "Islamic religious education" in Baden-Württemberg. We ask Muslim families to allow their children to attend Islamic religious education classes in the German language depending on the possibilities offered in Baden-Württemberg from the start of the school year 2006/2007.
- 2. We ask Muslim communities in Baden (add: and Württemberg!) to make every effort for Islam organisations in Germany to come to some sort of co-operation so that they are more easily approachable as partners for the public, churches and the State than before.
- 3. Muslim communities are asked to participate in the discussion about the identity of an open, diversified Islam in Europe. This also includes support for constitutional basic rights – in particular for the self-determination of women and girls, religious freedom and equality between man and woman.
- 4. We ask the persons responsible in Muslim communities to denounce the murder of women and girls that allegedly occur in the name of honour and to condemn violence in the name of religion. We will record such statements and pass them on.

5. Muslim communities are asked to accept invitations to discussions about points of common ground and differences.

(Statement by the Evangelical Executive Council in Baden dated 3 May 2005: “Meeting each other with respect”)

5. Acknowledgement

The Synod would like to thank all those who have so far been active in promoting the successful co-existence of Christians and Muslims in their private and professional lives, in church congregations or dialogue groups and request them to continue their efforts.