

## **People of faith share these values**

### **An appeal from interreligious leaders and representatives in Massachusetts**

Soon after September 11, 2001, leaders and representatives from the many religious communities who live, work, and worship in Massachusetts came together to assess the “sense of well-being” among us in a public atmosphere of heightened anxiety, fear, and mistrust.

Although Christian, Jewish, and Islamic organizations had fostered interfaith dialogues and relationships—in some cases, for many years—this was the first occasion when the official circle was widened to include other neighbors--Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs.

We are people of prayer. We have learned through our prayerful relationships that this must be the basis for all our thoughts and actions. Since that first meeting, we have continued to meet periodically. Our purposes are the same:

- to assess the sense of well-being of religious, racial, and ethnic communities in the Commonwealth;
- to provide opportunities for dialogue and mutual understanding among religious leaders and representatives;
- and to discuss opportunities for interfaith service or action.

If anything, subsequent developments have heightened the need to cultivate such interfaith conversations and relationships.

The decision to choose September 11, 2006 as the day to reconvene was made because we want to witness publicly to common values that we share as representatives of diverse religions:

- In response to those who attempt to use religion to divide, we affirm to one another, and to the world, the shared principles for peace, justice, and unity that are central teachings of our scriptures and traditions.
- We recognize the need to engage in dialogue with or, when appropriate, to challenge those in our own faith communities who may not affirm these common values.
- People of faith should not demonize those of other faiths or those who hold opposing views.
- Fundamental human rights and inherent human dignity always must be respected and protected.
- Criticism of policies or actions of opponents in a conflict should avoid appeals to prejudice toward religious, racial, or ethnic groups.
- People of faith seek reconciliation and promote justice—the restoration of right relationships in personal, religious, political, and economic spheres.
- In order to be a convincing witness to the world, we affirm that this reconciling spirit is a way of being and a way of behaving.

In naming these common values, we pledge to abide by them. In doing so, we acknowledge that participants in faith communities sometimes have fostered destructive negativity. We reject such negativity in all its manifestations.

We reassert our unwavering resolve to continue with our constructive inter-religious relations, both to achieve mutual understanding and cooperation, and to promote this spirit in the practical affairs of our multi-cultural society. Therefore, we give full support to all efforts at building inter-religious relations and inter-cultural initiatives that are guided by such a spirit.

We invite others to do so, as well. In the coming year, a unique convergence of calendars offers a special opportunity to do this together.

In October 2006 and 2007, the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the Jewish High Holy Days and Sukkot will coincide. This sacred month also includes the Christian Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi (October 4), who prayed that he be made an instrument of peace; and the Worldwide Communion Sunday of Protestants, to recognize their unity in Christ; and major feast days of the Orthodox Christians which is an affirmation of the unity they confess and seek. The convergence of these religious observances will not recur for another thirty years. The confluence of holy days in these several religious traditions will provide an occasion for interfaith dialogue and to affirm these common values.

We encourage people of faith in communities throughout the Commonwealth to seize this opportunity to gather and witness to these positive affirmations and common values. Because such inter-religious involvement may be a new experience for some, we are prepared to offer counsel based on our experiences of sustained dialogue and relationships.

Through sustained dialogue and relationships, barriers are removed and bridges are built. Strangers become neighbors. Neighbors become friends.

We are confident that the Holy is with us in every initiative that fosters the up-building of human community.

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