



Hand to Hand: a project of the ILRS Campaign Against Religious and Political Extremism

The ILRS Campaign Against Religious and Political Extremism emerged out of the recognition that intolerance and the voices of extremism have become louder in our societies in recent years. The Hand to Hand project is an attempt to confront intolerance and extremism by trying to find common ground between people of different faiths, and more important, common plans of action which allow for members of different faith groups to come together in building a stronger and more united community.

We offer five common principles that we feel are shared by all faiths, and five ideas to act in common across religious lines to demonstrate those principles. In and of themselves, these points are only words. But when taken up by members of the community, they can become the beginning of the end of intolerance and social exclusion. We in the ILRS invite you to take these ideas, and to let us know how you use them.

Common Principles

- As religious socialists, we believe that it is possible for people of different faiths to live together in peace, and that all should have freedom to worship openly without fear of oppression or persecution.
- As religious socialists, we support the inherent equality of humanity before creation, and the abolition of poverty throughout the world.
- As religious socialists, we affirm the equality of women in all spheres of life. We seek to draw out that belief in our communities of faith until it becomes a visible reality.
- As religious socialists, we seek the liberation of the human spirit through just laws and the practice of social justice in civil society.
- As religious socialists, we teach the integrity of creation and our stewardship of the environment.

Common Actions

- Communities of faith should set aside regular times throughout the year when believers can tour the various religious houses in their cities. A day trip, where

each of the houses of worship are visited, and the participants are allowed to witness how others worship, is one of the best ways we can overcome stereotypes about each other's beliefs. In this way, people can learn about each other's beliefs by meeting and talking with people who have those beliefs. That makes the believers real, and not just subjects of a book about their faith.

- Communities of faith should come together as religious believers to support issues that correspond to the common goals defined above. For example, hate crimes are an injustice to the entire human family; when a hate crime occurs, members of the religious community, of different faiths, should co-ordinate common responses and statements to the public condemning the crime and offering solutions to combat hate.

- Communities of faith should consider ways in which their social outreach can be joined with those of other faiths. For example, rather than using their charity work to proselytise for one particular religion, different congregations could work together to address a social need in their community that is crucial for people of all faiths.

- To connect the local with the global, leaders of the religious groups in the community could discuss common work on one or two international issues, to demonstrate the interdependence of humanity and its religious groups. Having Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Hindus working together in one place on an issue that affects Buddhists in another place sends an important, tangible signal that each of our faiths teaches us to care for the other in our midst.

- An interfaith women's group should be organised to identify issues of concern to women of different faiths, and allow for support in the community across religious lines. Often times women's issues are suppressed or hidden by reactionary currents within faith groups. Having a place where women can share those concerns regardless of their individual faiths is empowering and at the same time allows for the true role of women within a faith to be expressed openly.

We encourage groups to think of their own ideas on how to work together and find common issues between their religious groups. Let us know about new ideas and methods that apply to your area. Working to fight religious and political extremism is everyone's responsibility, but for religious socialists, it is also our obligation. We welcome your comments.

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