



Christian Interfaith Reference Group (CIRG) of The Canadian Council of Churches

Considerations for Implementing The Canadian Council of Churches' "Guide for Participation in Public Events Involving More than One Religious or Spiritual Tradition"

ADOPTED BY CIRG – MARCH 4, 2021

Note: This resource is intended to supplement The Canadian Council of Churches' *Guide for Participation in Public Events Involving More than One Religious or Spiritual Tradition*, which is available at www.councilofchurches.ca/interfaith.

This set of considerations has been prepared by the Christian Interfaith Reference Group (CIRG) of The Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). We recognize that each community differs in their needs, experiences, and goals when organizing or participating in shared ceremonies or events. For that reason, we offer the following considerations, lessons learned, and ideas to supplement the Council's [Guide for Participation in Public Events Involving More than One Religious or Spiritual Tradition](#).

1. Identify and invite appropriate representatives from various faith and spiritual communities

It can be challenging to determine who is best suited to represent which community. You may be part of a planning committee that needs to determine whom to invite to participate, or you may be invited to participate in an event planned by others. Either way, it is important to know and seek out the most appropriate candidates to represent each community.

Ideally there would be a broad representation of various religious and spiritual traditions, reflecting the population of the local community as well as the diversity within traditions. The appropriate representatives or leaders are best identified by members of the religious or spiritual communities they serve, and it can be helpful to include a member of the respective communities in the initial "endorsement" of participation if possible. It is also important that each participant has the support of the respective community for the specific event.



Building on existing networks of colleagues can be the best source to identify potential participants. An Internet search can be used as a last resort, or to complement your personal knowledge or research, but may not be the most helpful source of information beyond identifying broader community demographics and potential religious and spiritual communities to engage with.

It may also be helpful to ask local funeral directors or institutional chaplains (hospital, long-term care, prison, university, etc.), as they tend to work regularly with community religious and spiritual groups.

2. Navigate challenges involved in planning with short timelines

To be responsive and relevant, the timeline for planning public events with religious and spiritual leaders may be short. It can be helpful for a small planning team to put together a draft event outline that all participants can then engage with, revise, and edit as appropriate. Sensitive leadership is key; provide enough structure to move the process forward, but also remain attentive to the needs and responses of each participating person and tradition. Care must be taken to ensure full freedom to take ownership of each member's offering within the overall shape and intention of the event (celebration, lament, grief, protest, solidarity, etc.).

3. Local realities

Each community is unique, as is each religious or spiritual tradition. Communities might not have the desire or resources to be involved. This may be for doctrinal, mandate, interpersonal, or other reasons. These kinds of decisions should be respected, and if reasons are provided, they should be held in confidence. If questioned about the absence of a group or tradition, a simple referral to ask the tradition itself is helpful. Organizers can extend an invitation for alternative ways to participate – for example, an MC can read out a list of faith communities that support the sentiment but were unable to participate (no reason for non-participation needs to be given), or non-participating communities could be given the option to send something as a visual sign of their presence (flowers, art, etc.).

4. Lessons learned and ideas for planners

- a. It is helpful to know one another as religious and spiritual communities *before* the need for an inter-religious ceremony or event arises (for instance, a tragedy). As time permits, seek out and share ideas about how shared religious / spiritual leadership and presence in the community might unfold. Hospitality needs to be sensitive to space, dietary needs (if meeting for lunch, etc.), and other needs when extending invitations for these kinds of conversation. It is usually helpful to respectfully ask what is needed.



- b. When we are inviting religious or spiritual leaders to participate, we can ask: Who are the people we are serving? Whose voices do they need to hear? Are the representatives supported by their community to be present in this way?
- c. When we are invited, we can ask the same of ourselves.