

**Loyola University Chicago and Interfaith Collaboration:
Position, Explication, and Informing Sources**

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Loyola University Chicago's Mission Statement:

We are Chicago's Jesuit, Catholic University –
a diverse community seeking God in all things
and working to expand knowledge
in the service of humanity
through learning, justice, and faith.

Position

Loyola, a Catholic, Jesuit institution, promotes interfaith collaboration to learn from one another, identify shared values, and act upon those values to advance the common good.

An Explication:

Loyola University Chicago's mission is a source of its motivation and a foundation for interfaith cooperation rooted in its Catholic and Jesuit identity. To this end Loyola seeks to engage in interfaith collaboration so that we can learn from one another, identify shared values, and act upon those values to advance the common good. Motivated by a range of interests and strengths native to the university in its present cosmopolitan context, Loyola is committed to supporting dialogue and collaboration between members of different faith and humanistic traditions.

The Catholic values upon which Loyola is founded and the decrees of the Society of Jesus provide a solid foundation for our engagement in interfaith dialogue and our collaboration to advance the common good. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has consistently urged all its members to work for the common good with other Christians, members of all faiths, and all people of good will. Echoing this perspective, the decrees of the Society of Jesus emphasize the importance of dialogue. Rooted in our heritage, Loyola invites all to share in this dynamic relationship so as to live out Loyola's mission of "seeking God in all things."

Informing Sources

Loyola can trace its commitment to interfaith cooperation from the life of St. Ignatius (1491-1556) through the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and into contemporary documents, which all inform our understanding of the university's mission and tradition. These writings establish the foundation for interfaith cooperation and suggest a method of dialogue for the university's participation in interfaith cooperation.

In a letter St. Ignatius sent to his brother Jesuits en route to dialogue with Protestant Reformers at the Council of Trent, he offers the following advice: "I should be slow to speak, and would do so in a thoughtful, friendly fashion...so to appreciate and understand the point of view and disposition of the speakers, that I might the better reply, or keep silent. When speaking about matters in debate or other questions, the reasons on both sides ought to be given..." (Brodrick, *The Origin of the Jesuits*, page 221). The use of a thoughtful and respectful approach to dialogue is an early indication of the Jesuit approach to interfaith cooperation.

Jesuits have a long history in engagement of diverse cultures and traditions. Soon after their founding, Jesuits traveled to other societies around the globe where they promoted a model of religious and cultural exchange. In China, Matteo Ricci, who wrote an esteemed *Treatise on Friendship* in Chinese in 1595, opened a long era of respectful dialogue between China and the

West. In India in the early 1600s, Robert di Nobili engaged Hindu Brahmins and Muslim scholars in learned exchanges on the meaning of life and human destiny. In Latin America Jesuit missionaries worked with the Guarani (1609-1767) to establish communities where native culture flourished under indigenous leadership.

Accordingly, Loyola understands its commitment to interfaith cooperation to be borne out of a responsibility as we follow Pope John XXIII's lead in his great encyclical *Pacem in terris* (1963) where he calls our attention to respond to the global "signs of the times" (para. 126-129) and to Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes, The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World* (1965) which picks up on John's vision and holds that we have a duty of "scrutinizing the signs of the times." As the Pastoral Constitution states, "We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics" (para. 4). Our aim must be to help prepare peoples of all faiths, as well as those with no faith, to be able to responsibly engage the mounting challenges of the 21st century opening up before us.

In another Vatican II document, *Nostra aetate*, (1965) the Church recognized all the Abrahamic traditions, Hinduism, and Buddhism as reflecting God's truth. It affirmed that through an engagement with these faith traditions, Catholics can grow in their understanding of what it means to be a person. This document further exhorts Catholics to enter into dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions to "recognize, preserve and promote good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these (people)" (*Nostra aetate*, para. 2). In reality we also acknowledge the historical failures of Catholics and those from other religious traditions to meet this standard and recognize as well the painful examples of religious intolerance active in our present day.

More recently, in Decree 5 from the 34th General Congregation (GC) of the Society of Jesus (1995), Jesuits are encouraged to "cooperate wholeheartedly with all men and women of good will in promoting peace, justice, harmony, human rights and respect for all of God's creation" (para. 129). The decree makes the point that in a world marked by religious diversity, a positive relationship with believers of other faiths is a requirement for one to be religious. A culture of dialogue, the decree suggests, should become a characteristic of those who work in the world on the behalf of all people and for the greater glory of God.

The fostering of interreligious dialogue as highlighted in GC 34, Decree 5 directs Jesuits to follow the four-fold process recommended by the Church:

"a) The *dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.

"b) The *dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.

"c) The *dialogue of religious experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute."

"d) The *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.

Most recently, Loyola's document, *Transformative Education in the Jesuit Tradition*, describes our mission as infused with the conviction that all reality has a sacred character; that every human person is imbued with God-given dignity; and that faith, justice and reason exist in a mutually

informing dynamic. This document clearly states that “As a Jesuit and Catholic university, Loyola firmly believes that God’s grace is at work in each of the major religious traditions....”

RESOURCES

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