

# The 'Come and See' Religious Education Programme from the Archdiocese of Liverpool clearly outlines the importance of teaching about other faiths and religions and has incorporated this into the R.E. Curriculum.

## Judaism and Other Religions

### a. Why?

In his life on earth Jesus showed a respect for those within and outside his own faith community; for example his encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4) and the healing of the Roman centurion's servant (Luke 7). This encourages Christians to do likewise.

We live in a pluralistic country with people of different races, cultures and religions.

*Within our schools we are seeking to educate all pupils of whatever religion to be able to live a way of life that integrates their beliefs with all other aspects of what it means to be human. As part of this, they must learn to live alongside others who are different and hold alternative views, including religious views.<sup>40</sup>*

Children today live in a fast changing global world, where communication and travel opens them to diversity and challenge. It is important that we prepare them for this. Jesus, who is the fullness of God's revelation to humanity, showed respect for those within and outside his own faith community. The Church calls us to be committed to respecting people of other religions and to recognise that God is at work in them. The opening words of the document *Gaudium et Spes* expresses well our common humanity:

*"The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time... are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well."<sup>41</sup>*

Another important document from Vatican II was *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions):

*"In this age of ours, when people are drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between different peoples are being strengthened, the Church examines with greater care the relation which she has to non-Christian religions. Ever aware of her duty to foster unity and charity among individuals, and even among nations, she reflects at the outset on what people have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them. "All people form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth ( cf Acts 17: 26) and also because all share a common destiny, namely God..."*

*"The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines, which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all."<sup>42</sup>*

In more recent Church documents, Christians are directed to both witness and dialogue. This means entering into relationships with people of other religions. Taking children to places of worship of other religions provides experiences on which to base knowledge and understanding. Asking people of other religions or even children and staff within the school to talk about their religion is another way of making friends and paving the way for future good relationships. This is what the Church calls the "dialogue of life"; co-operation, respect for one another's convictions and traditions, and learning from each other in a very human way.<sup>43</sup>

40 paragraph. 201, Meeting God in Friend and Stranger 2010, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

41 *Gaudium et Spes* Vatican Council II, page 903 Preface, Flannery, 1975.

42 *Nostra Aetate* 1-2 Vatican Council, page 738-739, Flannery, Costello, 1975.

43 Cf *Redemptoris Missio*, 1990 nn 55, 57.

The Church teaches that, whilst living out our Christian faith, we are called to listen in dialogue and be ready to learn from those of other faiths, many of whom may, be our neighbours. The Bishops of England and Wales in *Catholic Schools and Other Faiths* (1997)<sup>44</sup> suggest that schools need to:

*"find ways in which pupils can learn to engage in dialogue and to develop an attitude of respect for religious diversity. This will necessitate the inclusion of a broader study of both Christianity and of other world faiths in the Religious Education syllabus. . . .*

*At the very least this will entail learning about such communities – their beliefs, traditions, religious practices, etc. But it may also mean learning from them, through encounter and dialogue at various levels. In a multi-faith society it is becoming increasingly important for Christians of all ages to reflect positively on the inter-faith relationships."*<sup>45</sup>

#### **b. How?**

*Pupils are encouraged not simply to learn facts about other religions but also to reflect upon them and gain insights from them.*<sup>46</sup>

The teaching of other religions for primary-aged children is about how the members of that faith community live as a family and how they worship. It begins from the faith community's own understanding of itself and what it is to be a member of a particular community.

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#### **Some principles**

- Each religion is taught separately in order to avoid confusion. Comparison can lead to inaccurate teaching and does not do justice to the integrity of each religion. Comparisons may be noted by the pupils, but that will not be the starting point of the teaching.
- Teaching of Judaism needs special attention because of the intrinsic relationships between Judaism and Christianity – our very roots lie in Judaism. However, while it is important to teach about Jesus' Jewish background this should be taught separately from modern Judaism as a world faith.
  - When you handle ritual objects, which are important to people of other religions, we do so with reverence and respect.
- Learn from a member of the religion, make a visit to a place of worship, but take care to check out speakers and visits. Ideally it is best to learn about religions from members of that religion but that is not always possible; if you do go to a place of worship find out what is expected of you in terms of dress and behaviour, prepare the group well so that there are no surprises.
- As with Christianity there are various expressions of any one religion. What is being taught here is a *middle of the road view*. It is too complex and confusing to go into too much detail about variations within religions. Judaism might be an exception, for example, where it is explained that in some synagogues the women sit separately from the men and don't read and in others women are more integrated.
  - Use of videos and the internet. There are many good websites and videos, but check them out carefully; not all videos and internet sites are of the same quality.
- Take care at assemblies or collective acts of worship. A *show and tell* information sharing is acceptable but we cannot worship as people of another religion, to do so would give the wrong message and might compromise the integrity of the Catholic faith.

<sup>44</sup> Page 22, the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, published by Matthew James 1997.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid page 22.

<sup>46</sup> Meeting God in Friend & Stranger 2010, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales; section 205

<sup>47</sup> Ibid 2011

