

A TIME FOR RECOMMITMENT

BUILDING THE NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

In the summer of 1947, 65 Jews and Christians from 19 countries gathered in Seelisberg, Switzerland. They came together to express their profound grief over the Holocaust, their determination to combat antisemitism, and their desire to foster stronger relationships between Jews and Christians. They denounced antisemitism both as a sin against God and humanity and as a danger to modern civilization. And to address these vital concerns, they issued a call in the form of 10 points to Christian churches to reform and renew their understandings of Judaism and the relationships between Judaism and Christianity.

Now, more than 60 years later, the International Council of Christians and Jews issues a new call—this one to both Christian and Jewish communities around the world. It commemorates the anniversary of the Seelisberg gathering, which was also the genesis of the International Council of Christians and Jews. Today’s call reflects the need to refine the Ten Points of Seelisberg, consistent with the advances in interreligious dialogue since that groundbreaking document of 1947.

This new call contains 12 points—presented as goals, and addressed to Christians and Jews, and to Christian and Jewish communities together. After listing the 12 points and several specific tasks for each one, the document reviews the history of the relationship between Christians and Jews, which has provided the contextual framework and impetus for our initiative.

We members of the International Council of Christians and Jews speak together in this new call as active members of our traditions with a centuries-long history of alienation, hostility and conflict, punctuated by instances of persecution and violence against Jews in Christian-dominated Europe, as well by as moments of graciousness and mutual recognition from which we can take inspiration

Spurred by the Seelisberg initiative, we have worked to overcome the legacy of prejudice, hatred and mutual distrust. Through a serious commitment to dialogue, self-critical examination of our texts and traditions, and joint study and action for justice, we better understand each other, accept each other in the fullness of our differences, and affirm our common humanity. We understand that Jewish-Christian relations are not a “problem” that is going to be “solved,” but rather a continuing process of learning and refinement. Perhaps most important, we have found friendship and trust. We have sought and found light together.

The journey has been neither simple nor easy. We have encountered many obstacles and setbacks, including conflicts—some quite serious—over theological or historical developments. But our determination to pursue the dialogue in spite of difficulties, to communicate honestly, and to assume our partners’ good will has helped us stay the course. For these reasons, we believe that the history, the challenges, and the accomplishments of our dialogue are relevant for all those who are dealing with intergroup and interreligious conflicts.

In that spirit, we issue this call to Christian and Jewish communities around the world.

A TIME FOR RECOMMITMENT: THE TWELVE POINTS OF BERLIN

A CALL TO CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH COMMUNITIES WORLDWIDE

We, the International Council of Christians and Jews and our member organizations, resolve to renew our engagement with the Ten Points of Seelisberg that inspired our beginnings. Therefore, we issue these calls to Christians, Jews, and all people of good will:

A Call To Christians and Christian Communities

We commit ourselves to the following goals and invite all Christians and Christian communities to join us in the continuing effort to remove all vestiges of contempt towards Jews and enhance bonds with the Jewish communities worldwide.

1. To combat religious, racial and all other forms of antisemitism

Biblically

- By recognizing Jesus' profound identity as a Jew of his day, and interpreting his teachings within the contextual framework of first-century Judaism.
- By recognizing Paul's profound identity as a Jew of his day, and interpreting his writings within the contextual framework of first-century Judaism.
- By emphasizing that recent scholarship on both the commonality and gradual separation of Christianity and Judaism is critical for our basic understanding of the Jewish-Christian relationship.
- By presenting the two Testaments in the Christian Bible as complementary and mutually affirming rather than antagonistic or inferior/superior. Denominations that use lectionaries are encouraged to choose and link biblical texts that offer such an affirming theology.
- By speaking out against Christian misreadings of biblical texts regarding Jews and Judaism that can provoke caricatures or animosity.

Liturgically

- By highlighting the connection between Jewish and Christian liturgy.
- By drawing upon the spiritual richness of Jewish interpretations of the scriptures.
- By cleansing Christian liturgies of anti-Jewish perspectives, particularly in preaching, prayers and hymns.

Catechetically

- By presenting the Christian-Jewish relationship in positive tones in the education of Christians of all ages, underlining the Jewish foundations of Christian belief and accurately describing the ways Jews themselves understand their own traditions and practices. This includes the curricula of Christian schools, seminaries and adult education programs.
- By promoting awareness of the long-lived traditions of Christian anti-Judaism and providing models for renewing the unique Jewish-Christian relationship.
- By underscoring the immense religious wealth found in the Jewish tradition, especially by studying its authoritative texts.

2. To promote interreligious dialogue with Jews

- By understanding dialogue as requiring trust and equality among all participants and rejecting any notion of convincing others to accept one's own beliefs.
- By appreciating that dialogue encourages participants to examine critically their own perceptions of both their own tradition and that of their dialogue partners in the light of a genuine engagement with the other.

3. To develop theological understandings of Judaism that affirm its distinctive integrity

- By eliminating any teachings that Christians have replaced Jews as a people in covenant with God.
- By emphasizing the common mission of Jews and Christians in preparing the world for the kingdom of God or the Age to Come.
- By establishing equal, reciprocal working relationships with Jewish religious and civic organizations.

- By ensuring that emerging theological movements from Asia, Africa and Latin America, and feminist, liberationist or other approaches integrate an accurate understanding of Judaism and Christian-Jewish relations into their theological formulations.
- By opposing organized efforts at the conversion of Jews.

4. To pray for the peace of Jerusalem

- By promoting the belief in an inherent connectedness between Christians and Jews.
- By understanding more fully Judaism's deep attachment to the Land of Israel as a fundamental religious perspective and many Jewish people's connection with the State of Israel as a matter of physical and cultural survival.
- By reflecting on ways that the Bible's spiritual understanding of the land can be better incorporated into Christian faith perspectives.
- By critiquing the policies of Israeli and Palestinian governmental and social institutions when such criticism is morally warranted, at the same time acknowledging both communities' deep attachment to the land.
- By critiquing attacks on Zionism particularly when they become expressions of antisemitism.
- By joining with Jewish, Christian and Muslim peace workers, with Israelis and Palestinians, to build trust and peace in a Middle East where all can live secure in independent, viable states rooted in international law and guaranteed human rights.
- By enhancing the security and prosperity of Christian communities both in Israel and Palestine.
- By working for improved relations among Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Middle East and the rest of the world.

A Call To Jews and Jewish Communities

We commit ourselves to the following goals and invite all Jews and Jewish communities to join us in the continuing effort to remove all vestiges of animosity and caricature toward Christians and to enhance bonds with Christian churches of the world.

5. To acknowledge the efforts of many Christian communities in the late 20th century to reform their attitudes toward Jews

- By learning about these reforms through more intensive dialogue with Christians.
- By discussing the implications of changes in Christian churches regarding Jews and their understandings of Judaism.
- By teaching Jews of all ages about these changes, both in the context of the history of Jewish-Christian relations and according to the appropriate stage of education for each group.
- By including basic and accurate background information about Christianity in the curricula of Jewish schools, rabbinic seminaries and adult education programs.
- By studying the New Testament both as Christianity's sacred text and as literature written to a large degree by Jews in an historical-cultural context similar to early Rabbinic literature, thereby offering insight into the development of Judaism in the early centuries of the Common Era.

6. To re-examine Jewish texts and liturgy in the light of these Christian reforms

- By grappling with Jewish texts that appear xenophobic or racist, realizing that many religious traditions have uplifting, inspirational texts as well as problematic ones. The emphasis for all religious traditions should be on texts that promote tolerance and openness.
- By placing problematic texts within their historical context, in particular writings from the times when Jews were a powerless, persecuted and humiliated minority.
- By addressing the possible re-interpretation, change or omission of parts of Jewish liturgy that treat others in problematic ways.

7. To differentiate between fair-minded criticism of Israel and antisemitism

- By understanding and promoting biblical examples of just criticism as expressions of loyalty and love.
- By helping Christians appreciate that communal identity and interconnectedness are intrinsic to Jewish self-understanding, in addition to religious faith and practice, therefore making the commitment to the survival and security of the State of Israel of great importance to most Jews.

8. To offer encouragement to the State of Israel as it works to fulfil the ideals stated in its founding documents, a task Israel shares with many nations of the world.

- By ensuring equal rights for religious and ethnic minorities, including Christians, living within the Jewish state.
- By achieving a just and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A Call To Both Christian and Jewish Communities and Others

We commit ourselves to the following goals and invite Jews, Christians and Muslims, together with all people of faith and goodwill, always to respect the other and to accept each other's differences and dignity.

9. To enhance interreligious and intercultural education

- By combating negative images of others, teaching the foundational truth that each human being is created in the image of God.
- By making the removal of prejudices against the other a high priority in the educational process.
- By encouraging mutual study of religious texts, so that Jews, Christians, Muslims and members of other religious groups can learn both from and with each other.
- By supporting common social action in the pursuit of common values.

10. To promote interreligious friendship and cooperation as well as social justice in the global society

- By rejoicing in the uniqueness of each person, and promoting everyone's political, economic and social well-being.
- By recognizing as equal citizens members of faith traditions who have migrated to new homelands where they may have become part of a religious minority.
- By striving for equal rights for all people, regardless of their religion, gender or sexual orientation.
- By recognizing and grappling with the fact that feelings of religious superiority—and an accompanying sense that other religions are inferior—are present in each tradition, including one's own.

11. To enhance dialogue with political and economic bodies

- By collaborating with political and economic bodies whenever possible to promote interreligious understanding.
- By benefiting from political and economic groups' growing interest in interreligious relations.
- By initiating discussion with political and economic bodies around the urgent need for justice in the global community.

12. To network with all those whose work responds to the demands of environmental stewardship

- By fostering commitment to the belief that every human being is entrusted with the care of the Earth.
- By recognizing the shared Jewish and Christian biblical duty toward creation, and the responsibility to bring it to bear in public discourse and action.

To all these challenges and responsibilities, we—the International Council of Christians and Jews and its member organizations—commit ourselves.

Berlin, Germany, July 2009

At the International Conference and the Annual General Meeting of the International Council of Christians and Jews.