

Teacher Resources

Guidelines to Address Religious Misunderstanding and Opposition

Recommendations from WV World Religious Roundtable, Bangkok: 7 January '05

Don Posterski and Tim Dearborn, Coordinators (Edit 7/05)

Our work can lead to misunderstanding, opposition and threatened security.

The following guidelines are to encourage WV's organizational positioning, mitigate opposition, increase mutual understanding and address potential security issues.

1. *Seek to honour and love God and people in all we do*
 - a. Live the Great Commandment and also the Great Commission (Mt 22.37-39; 28:18-20)
 - b. Pursue the Great Requirement (Micah 6.8)
2. *Use wise strategies for entrance into a community and country*
 - a. Begin by building good relationships and engaging in dialogue with community leaders
 - b. Carefully select credible local and expatriate staff
 - c. Be transparent about our identity as Christian development, relief and advocacy organization
 - d. Identify and foster relationships with allies in the community
3. *Insist on respectful attitudes among our staff toward people of other faiths*
 - a. Affirm common values and concerns
 - b. Counter incorrect stereotypes of other religions
 - c. As appropriate, honor cultural rituals.
4. *Equip Christian Staff*
 - a. Ensure that all Christian staff are knowledgeable and confident in the Gospel, understanding their own faith and how it relates to their professional competence
 - b. Ensure that all Christian staff understand the dominant religion and culture of the context and how the Gospel relates to them
 - c. Nurture vibrant spirituality through regular devotions and intercession
 - d. Avoid recruiting Christian staff from only one church or ethnic background
5. *Equip staff of other world religions*
 - a. Make sure all staff of other world religions know our policies and values and how they relate contextually
 - b. Respect the religious commitments of staff of other faiths and provide the same accommodation of time for religious devotions as done for Christian staff
 - c. Provide appropriate opportunities for staff of other faiths to develop an understanding of WV's Christian commitments
6. *Solidify our role as insiders to the community*
 - a. Acknowledge the extended influence of staff as they relate to their families, clans, and communities
 - b. Participate in local celebration as appropriate
 - c. Join in mourning local grief
 - d. Respect significant cultural issues: alcohol, holy days, dress, etc.

Teacher Resources

7. Seek counsel

- a. Recruit and cultivate credible local advocates and wise advisors
- b. Ask local people who oppose us to help us understand their context
- c. Invite national and international experts to give counsel regarding our programs and positions

8. Establish relationships with government, business, civic and religious leaders

- a. Give accurate information of who we are and why we serve
- b. Acknowledge that being autonomous and isolated creates vulnerabilities, identify key leaders and relate intentionally with them:
- c. With governance both at national and local levels, senior leaders and lower level bureaucrats who can exert significant influence
- d. With churches: with official structures, hierarchies; personal relations with church leaders
- e. With other NGOs: consortiums, networks that extend influence, credibility and protection.

9. Encourage local church engagement

- a. Demonstrate an understanding of other religions and respect for people of other faiths
- b. Include churches in the provision of social services and the development of relationships with civil society leaders
- c. Provide forums that involve both church and other world religions leaders

10. Use media effectively with global consistency

- a. Ensure consistent global communication of our Christian identity throughout the Partnership
- b. Build working relations with local media, journalists, editors, reporters
- c. Be proactive in providing media with positive stories.

11. Discern the reasons for possible opposition

- a. While recognizing that the offense of the gospel is sometimes unavoidable, make sure that we are not offensive for the wrong reasons
- b. People may confuse sponsorship with an intent to indoctrinate children
- c. People may perceive us as agents of the West, globalization and secularism
- d. People may have negative impressions of the morality of Christians
- e. People may disrespect us if we seem to be inconsistent or defensive about our faith

12. Take action to decrease tension

- a. Acknowledging that development alters power structures and triggers social change, understand who might be threatened and seek to build relationships with them
- b. Follow the 'do no harm' principles
- c. Deliberately seek to address and resolve problems

13. Be proactive in preparing staff for opposition

- a. Expect that opposition may come and identify potential sources
- b. Equip staff to know what to say in response to questions, train staff in Q&A
- c. Nourish staff spirituality and affirm their spiritual gifts
- d. Encourage intentional and persistent prayer
- e. Orient staff in a specific security strategy