Journeying Together in Love and Peace
A Malaysian Christian Response to A Common Word

Preamble
We welcome and are greatly encouraged by the initiative taken by leading Muslim scholars and leaders through the Open Letter, A Common Word Between Us and You. This letter highlights key elements of loving God and loving our neighbour, which both faith communities deem as central.

In our shared history we have often misunderstood one another resulting in suspicion and lack of positive engagement. Therefore, this invitation is a courageous step towards fresh perspectives in Christian-Muslim relations. It also serves as a catalyst for new initiatives to move beyond conflicts and mere coexistence.

We recognize and applaud the foundation already laid by Church leaders, Christian bodies and Scholars who have laboured towards mutual respect and understanding through the ages. As Christians living in Malaysia, where the majority of our neighbours are Muslims, we would like to make our humble contribution in nurturing Christian-Muslim relations today.

We believe that the focus on loving God and loving our neighbour engenders wider implications and invites participation beyond our faith communities. The universal call to love is shared by all people of faith.

Present Reality
As Malaysians, we recognize our aspiration towards a shared destiny and the common good of all people. We are thankful for the existing good relations among people of all faiths. However, as a minority community we recognize the long term challenges of living together in a pluralistic context. Increasingly, there appears to be a shrinking common ground for public discourse and action on mutual concerns, especially with regard to the poor and marginalized in society.

Furthermore, the implications of global realities have had its knock on effects on local sensibilities. This includes misguided superiority, misunderstandings due to distrust, disrespectful caricatures of the other, and extremism even to the point of violence. Sometimes, such attitudes have been perpetuated by members and leaders of our own faith communities. Furthermore, religion has often been misused as a tool for political mileage and personal gain. Such actions have resulted in accentuating misunderstanding between the two faith communities, thus creating severe barriers rather than lasting bridges for peace.

Therefore, the urgency for a renewed engagement with one another becomes critical. A Common Word provides a positive way forward with mutual respect and openness whilst being faithful to our respective faiths.
**Love of God and Love of Neighbour**

We are thankful that the Letter highlights similarities on our key understandings of Love of God and Love of Neighbour. Fundamental theological distinctives in our understandings of God are not ignored but rather respected.

However, we are reminded of the complexities involving interpretation of our respective texts. Selective readings can easily give rise to misunderstandings regarding each other’s belief and religious traditions. As such, we are committed to listening closely to one another, exploring each other’s beliefs with care and understanding while engaging in respectful conversation. This liberating process should then free us from parochial thinking, empowering us towards mutual learning and appreciation of one another.

We believe that the concept of Love of God and love of neighbour also encompasses commitment to Truth, Justice and Peacemaking within the wider framework of the whole of humanity and all of God’s creation.

**Journeying Together in Mutual Respect and Love**

As people of faith, we are called to pave the way towards nation building based on justice, peace and reconciliation. We hope our journey together in mutual respect and love transcends all ethnic, ideological, political and social divisions.

It becomes incumbent upon us to practice reciprocal engagement in society undergirded with historic uniting instruments such as, the concept of Muhibbah (Friendship and Companionship) and the principles of the Rukun Negara. Such an understanding, in reality is a “dialogue of life” where there is a common sharing of aspirations, hopes, struggles, concerns, and interests. This enables us to progress from tolerance to shared respect and constructive engagement, resulting in the embracing of one another.

Concerted effort must be taken to prevent the mistakes of our past. Our shared journey compels us to draw from the wealth of our experiences and faith traditions. Present and future generations who value the common ground of love, peace and harmony could then work together towards a shared destiny, joint vision and a brighter future.

Our prayer is that this would eventually lead us towards determined action for the good of all and the ultimate glory of God.

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