

RELIGIOUS HARMONY AND COMMUNITY POLICY



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Preamble

1. Culture and Core Values Articulated: Know why we do it

As a church, we want to reflect our culture and core values in the way we relate to people, approach situations and deal with problems that arise in our church life. These policies will help to articulate in a clearer and more systematic way what our culture and core values are. In other words, they set out why we do what we do.

2. Consistency Assured: Know what to do and how to do it

As the church grows and the leadership expands, it is important to ensure that there is still a consistent approach to situations and circumstances. Policies take personalities out of the picture so decisions are based on principles and not on an individual basis. Each situation will be dealt with thoughtfully and purposefully, reducing the possibility of problems arising due to inconsistency. Best practices are also developed as we strive towards our vision of becoming a world-class church in a first-world nation. As these policies will form the platform for training, this also ensures leaders and volunteers, especially newly appointed ones are sufficiently equipped to handle their responsibilities and they will now know how and what to do in the various situations they may encounter in their jobs and ministries.

3. Covering and Accountability: Protect what we do

Policies provide a layer of covering for our church congregation as the systems set up provide a safe and secure environment for all, especially the youth and children.

In addition, they assure the public and authorities that there are clearly stated systems and processes in place in our organization. With authorities defined, boundaries set, and responsibilities delegated, it is known to all who does the task, why it is done, and under what conditions it is done and helps to ensure the accountability of all involved. They also prepare the church to respond to emergencies swiftly and appropriately.

These policies also enable us to keep a lookout for each other so that if we observe behaviour that does not comply with the standards set, we know how we should respond and who we should inform.

Furthermore, it will minimize the likelihood of the church and those who work and volunteer in it being subject to unwarranted accusation and suspicion. Complying with these policies will go a long way in protecting what we do in church.

4. Disclaimer

These policies are not intended to create an implied or express contract with any person. They are not intended to create a legally enforceable or binding promise or representation.

It should be noted that these policies are non-exhaustive, as it is impossible to anticipate and provide for every conceivable situation or circumstance that could possibly arise. It may be necessary to modify or depart from this policy in certain cases based on unique facts and circumstances, and Heart of God Church reserves the right to modify or depart from this policy where necessary.

Religious Harmony and Community Policy

1. Policy Principles

- 1.1 The purpose of this Policy is to set out the position of Heart of God Church (“HOGC”) and the principles by which HOGC will abide by in order to maintain religious harmony and to support our community.
- 1.2 According to the values in our Singapore Pledge and as set out in the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (Cap 167A), the key principles underpinning our Religious Harmony and Community Policy are to:
 - RESPECT other faiths and community groups
 - Build RELATIONSHIPS with other religions and community groups
 - RESPOND in love to needs within our community
- 1.3 We recognise that we exist not as an isolated religious entity but as a member of our local community in Singapore and as such relationships with other religious and community groups within the community are very important. As an expression of our commitment in this area, Heart of God Church has joined and is a member of the Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circle “IRCC”.
- 1.4 HOGC is one of the initial 250 religious organisations who have come together to affirm our shared Commitment to Safeguard Religious Harmony launched by senior religious leaders at the occasion of the International Conference on Cohesive Societies. This is our stand against division and discord between religious communities.
- 1.5 We also see it as our responsibility to teach the next generation to protect the harmony we have in Singapore. We share our Statement of Support for the updates to the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act.

2. RESPECT Other Faiths and Community Groups

- 2.1 We understand that Singapore is a multiracial and multi-religious society and that mutual respect, tolerance and restraint are essential to maintaining peace and harmony in our society.
- 2.2 As Christians, our core belief is to spread the Good News by sharing the love of God. We do so with utmost sensitivity, respect and consideration for all other faiths and community groups.
- 2.3 Whilst we do not deny or deliberately hide the fact that we are Christians, we must nevertheless be sensitive and respectful in our words and deeds to avoid causing offence to other faiths and community groups
- 2.4 Whilst each of us are free to share our beliefs, it must never be by way of insulting or denigrating others. We respect their practices.
- 2.5 We believe in reaching out by building meaningful friendships and meeting the needs of others with the love of God. When we share stories and invite people to join us for church services or activities, we do so with wisdom, sensitivity and discretion.
- 2.6 When sharing the Good news, we do not pressurize or force anyone. We respect their decisions. We recognise that any form of hard selling of Christianity may cause offence and this is a situation we are to avoid.

2.7 We have specifically dealt with four main areas of sensitivity in this Policy:

- Muslims/Malays
- Preachers/Speakers
- School Students/Teachers
- Global Missions Work

3. Muslims/Malays

3.1 It has always been an unwritten rule in Heart of God Church since the church began that we do not invite Muslims or Malays to Heart of God Church.

3.2 In July 2008, a formal policy was enacted whereby specific action was to be taken by the church leadership should it be brought to the knowledge of a leader that there was a Muslim or Malay minor (below the age of 21 years) who came to attend a service at Heart of God Church. This includes requiring the said Muslim or Malay who wished to return to Heart of God Church for future services to produce a signed parental consent form.

3.3 In July 2010, the policy was updated to require the Muslim or Malay himself to further acknowledge that they were aware of this policy should they wish to continue on their own accord to attend Heart of God Church activities and services.

3.4 In December 2010, the policy was further modified and updated as follows:

3.4.1 No Heart of God Church member should reach out to or invite a Muslim or Malay to Heart of God Church services.

3.4.2 According to the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (Cap. 167A), we strongly discourage Malays or Muslims or those from Muslim backgrounds, especially minors, to participate in or attend any of our church services.

3.4.3 Should leaders be informed that a member has invited a Muslim or Malay to Heart of God Church, they should:

- Tell the member not to continue inviting the said Muslim or Malay.
- Advise the member on the principles of this Policy

3.4.4 Should any leader gain information of a Muslim or Malay attending or intending to attend a service or activity of Heart of God Church, the church should be informed.

3.4.5 Should the said Muslim or Malay come only once; no action is necessary. If however the said Muslim or Malay is 16 years old and below, or still in secondary school, the leader in charge should make best efforts to ensure that the child seeks their parent's consent (oral consent is acceptable) as to whether he can attend even that very first service or activity. If no consent is given, this Muslim or Malay child would be advised to leave the service or activity.

3.4.6 Should the said Muslim or Malay come more than once; the leader should talk to him to:

- Explain that we strongly discourage Muslims or Malays to attend Heart of God Church services/events.
- Explain that it is part of our policy to maintain religious harmony in Singapore.

- Explain that if he/she wishes to continue to attend service he/she must duly complete and sign/obtain signatures for the following forms:
 - Parental Consent Forms (only for those 16 years old and below, or still in secondary school)
 - Acknowledgement Form (only for those 17 years old or above the secondary school level, whichever the older)
- 3.4.7 For Muslims or Malays who are 16 years old and below, or still in secondary school, a signed Parental Consent Form must be obtained on or before their second visit to a church service or activity.
- 3.4.8 For Muslims or Malays who are 17 years old or above the secondary school age, they must sign an Acknowledgement Form on or before their second visit to a church service or activity.

Summary:

Muslims or Malays (age)	1st Visit	Subsequent Visit
16 years old and below / Secondary School	Parent's oral consent	Parental Consent Form
17 years old and above / above Secondary School		Acknowledgement Form

- 3.4.9 Exception: The only exception to when the guidelines in 2.7 do not have to be complied with is if the Malay/Muslim (regardless of age) participates in a service or activity organised by Heart of God Church (whether of a religious nature or otherwise, whether in Heart of God Church or a 3rd party venue) through the IRCC Community Engagement Programme.

3.5 Preachers and Speakers

- 3.5.1 It is our responsibility to highlight to our preachers and speakers, both local and foreign that there are principles and boundaries that they will have to abide by and be aware of when sharing their messages in Singapore.
- 3.5.2 Singapore is a multi-religious and multi-racial society. Very uniquely, various races and religions have co-existed peacefully and harmoniously with one other for many decades. In recent years the world has seen the rise of extremist ideologies among various religious, political and other interest groups. The Government has recognized these trends and is working with all faith groups to achieve religious harmony and mutual respect. The Prime Minister has made the following statement:

“Our religious leaders understand the need for accommodation. They reject

extremist ideologies and oppose exclusivist teachings. All the communities live side by side, interact with one another, and practice their own faiths and customs peacefully”

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (Straits Times 24 July 2017)

- 3.5.3 The Government has also communicated to religious groups that foreign preachers and speakers whose messages do not reflect such values will be banned from speaking in Singapore.
- 3.5.4 We respect the Singapore Government and would also require all our preachers and speakers to display a similar respect in their messages. We therefore ask our preachers and speakers not to comment and preach about other religions, races and politics. In particular our preachers and speakers should not:
- Despise practices or rituals of other religions and call or imply that they are extremist in any way
 - Stir up any feelings of Islamophobia
 - Comment on the subject of race or express any racist statements
 - Issue any critical comments about the Singapore Government especially regarding freedom of speech or the right to demonstrate. Singapore is a melting pot of races and religions and our laws have done an excellent job in protecting everyone’s rights and assuring our safety, including all minority groups.
- 3.5.5 It is imperative that our preachers and speakers understand that if they were to cross the line, action will be taken by the Singapore Government including, but not limited to having to issue a public apology, being fined and/or being repatriated. They may also be banned from future speaking engagements in Singapore.

3.6 Primary and Secondary School Students

- 3.6.1 We recognise that schools are a common space for students of all races, religions and backgrounds to mix freely. As such, we need to be especially sensitive when interacting with students in this space.
- 3.6.2 This part of the Policy specifically applies to
- Leaders
 - Teachers who work in primary and secondary schools.

Leaders

- 3.6.3 Leaders should not go to a primary or secondary school they are not studying in (whether within or outside the school premises) to do the following:
- Organising of religious activities such as conducting bible study sessions
 - Mass distribution of promotional flyers/brochures and evangelistic tracts related to Christianity or church
 - Unsolicited sharing of the gospel message of salvation
 - Waiting outside the school gate to meet students.

Teachers

3.6.4 We recognise that teachers have the power or are in a position to influence the students. They should therefore exercise wisdom, sensitivity and discretion in their speech and conduct in schools and ensure that they do not abuse their positions of authority as they comply with the Policy Principles. They should also comply with all relevant policies or codes of conduct imposed by their employers.

3.6.5 Teachers who work in primary or secondary schools should not do the following (whether within or outside the school premises):

- Organising of religious activities such as conducting bible study sessions
- Mass distribution of promotional flyers/brochures and evangelistic tracts related to Christianity or church
- Unsolicited sharing of the gospel message of salvation
- Waiting outside the school gate to meet students.

3.7 Global Missions

3.7.1 When conducting conferences or services or when doing missions work overseas in another country, we will also conduct ourselves with wisdom and discretion. We must be sensitive to the political, cultural, religious, and racial sensitivities of the country we are in and apply all the principles stated above.

4. **Building RELATIONSHIPS with other Religions and Community Groups**

4.1 We support and promote inter-religious and inter-racial events.

4.2 We stand up for the community in times of crisis. In time of crisis where there is racial or religious tension, we will align our church with the national objective of promoting racial and religious harmony and stand in solidarity with other religious, ethnic or other community groups.

5. **RESPOND in love to needs within the Community**

5.1 We show care and concern for our community. We work together with our partners in community service projects to show care and concern for our community such as Tuition and Mentoring Programmes as well as Blood Donation drives.

5.2 We give to the community. We set aside a Community Engagement Budget to donate and give to other religious, ethnic and community groups. When we receive donations or gifts from other religious, ethnic or community groups during festivals such as Ramadan or 7th month Hungry Ghost Festival, we graciously accept such giving and will channel it to other charitable causes within the church such as disaster relief or Heart Community Service. Such donations and gifts are not used to fund our church's operations.